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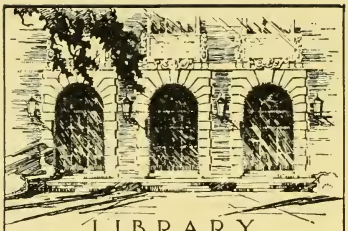

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CHILDREN OF GIBEON

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CHILDREN OF GIBEON

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN'
'DOROTHY FORSTER' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London
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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

BOOK II.—continued.

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	THE LADY WITH THE PARASOL	1
XXI.	A FRIENDLY FATHER	22
XXII.	THE DOCTOR SPEAKS	41
XXIII.	HOW MELENDA WAS DRILLED	58
XXIV.	MELENDA IS VANQUISHED	84
XXV.	LIZZIE'S TEMPTATION	106
XXVI.	NO DEFENCE	126
XXVII.	ALICIA	141
XXVIII.	RETURN, O SHULAMITE	152
XXIX.	THE LAST EVENING	174
XXX.	THE BISHOP'S DEATHBED	190
XXXI.	HOME AGAIN	220
XXXII.	THE FINDING OF THE INQUEST	243
XXXIII.	COMING OF AGE	272
XXXIV.	VALENTINE SPEAKS	290

CHILDREN OF GIBEON

BOOK II.—continued.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LADY WITH THE PARASOL.

THERE are some institutions, some kinds of wickedness, some classes of men, some modes of suffering, which seem, to people of the gentle life, outside the possibility of any connection with themselves. They belong to another kind of creature, only outwardly resembling them. The Prison, for example, is an institution only known to most of us by hearsay: those kinds of sin which bring upon us the man in blue, are such as we think we shall never commit—the disgrace, shame, and remorse of crime, are among the emotions which we shall never feel. This way of looking at life is, of

course, misleading, because everything becomes possible when one is tempted.

Valentine had learned already that the girl Polly, whom she personated, was the daughter of a dead convict: she learned now that the dead had returned to life, and was prepared to heap coals of unspeakable disgrace upon everybody connected with him, unless she could stave him off. And in Ivy Lane, under the same roof, were the man's daughter and the man's chief victim; for there could not be, even in Mr. Carey's remarkable career, another instance of wickedness quite so bad as the case of Mr. Lane; and every night, also in Ivy Lane, sharing the same bed with his own daughter, was his victim's daughter. There cannot possibly be any misfortune much worse to bear than a disgraceful father. A foolish father, a spendthrift father, a miser, a brute, an evil liver, a selfish father—these are common, and have often to be endured. But to have such a father as James Carey, Prince of Burglars, that is indeed a cross not often laid upon suffering humanity. To be sure he was not Valentine's father; but she felt as if, but for the accident of Violet being Polly, he might have

been. When she went home in the morning the little room upon which this Evil Spirit might at any time intrude his detestable presence if he found out the place, seemed like an Oasis of Rest, with its flowers and pictures. Lotty was lying on the bed, now her permanent abode; her eyes were closed, but she was not sleeping, and she welcomed Valentine's return with a smile of affection which went straight to her heart, and filled her eyes with tears. When one is in great trouble even a little thing will sometimes do this.

'My dear,' Valentine said, kissing her, 'have you had a good night? I was obliged to stay at Tottenham.'

'I am always having bad nights now. Melenda's been sitting up with me—I've been dreadful bad—I'm glad it wasn't you again.'

'But Melenda was working all day—she must not sit up all night.'

'She liked doing it—oh! Valentine'—Lotty held out her thin hand to take Valentine's—'she is always half-starved—we were all half starved till you came—and now work is slack: and what will she do, poor thing? And she's harder and more independent than ever!'

'What can I do for her?' She thought of a danger almost worse than starvation. 'Lotty, we are all in terrible trouble.'

'Not you, Valentine—you haven't got any trouble, have you?'

'Yes, I have, Lotty—but don't talk about it.'

'And I'm such a burden to you! Oh! if I could get better. I'll show you, and Melenda too, as soon as I get better.'

'Yes, dear—don't think of yourself as a burden, Lotty. The trouble has nothing to do with money.'

'Melenda's jealous,' Lotty went on. 'But she's not so jealous as she was—she doesn't sniff any more when she looks at your pretty things. In the night, when she thought I was asleep, she began to cry—she kept on crying. Do you think she cried about the work being slack? I never saw her cry before, except when she was in a rage!'

Valentine turned her face away. There was reason enough for Melenda's crying in Lotty's hollow cheeks and lustrous eyes, in her weakness and her bad nights.

It was the Doctor's morning. He called, and gave his patient a few directions. Then

Valentine followed him down the stairs. He replied to the unspoken questions which he read in her eyes :

'I think, exactly and truthfully, that she may last perhaps till the spring. That's all there is to think.'

'Poor Lotty!'

'When the weather gets chilly you might send her to Ventnor or somewhere, if she can travel, and so prolong her life a little—it's my business to prolong life. But'—he pointed to the direction of Melenda's room—'is that kind of thing worth living for? Perhaps there is something beyond, and perhaps there isn't. I'd rather take my chances on the other side, if I were Lotty, than stay here. Not that she will be asked—poor girl!—which she'd rather have.'

'She is happier now; she seems to forget the past miseries. It is something for her to have sufficient food and to rest.'

'And when you go away, what is to prevent all the miseries coming back?'

'The past shall never return, for her or for the others, Doctor, if I can help it. We may be powerless against the system which makes

slaves of these girls, but we can do something for one here and there!'

'I believe you are the Countess of Monte Cristo! I hear the same story about you wherever I go. I wonder if your ladyship keeps millions in the cupboard?'

'No; my millions are not there.'

'Has your ladyship a sister called Melenda?'

'Perhaps.'

'You are not well this morning,' said the Doctor, changing his tone; 'you've got a black ring round your eyes, and your cheeks are white. What's the matter with you?'

'I am in great trouble,' said Valentine, 'but I cannot tell you what it is.'

'Well—anyhow, don't vex your soul about the women. We'll get the Labour League some day and work wonders; see if we don't. The men shall rule it, though—it's good for women to be ruled by men.'

Then Valentine sat down and waited, curious to learn what the convict would do next.

The convict behaved exactly as might have been expected of him, only with greater promptitude; for the very next day, Valentine

got a letter from him, addressed to the almshouse, stating that, by a most unfortunate accident, he had lost the sovereign she had given him and was now penniless, but full of trust that his daughter would see her repentant father through.

She made no reply to this letter. Two days afterwards there came another. A most magnificent chance occurred, he said, by which, for thirty pounds down, he could secure a tobacconist's shop, a going concern, with a connection in the newspaper line. Only thirty pounds wanted to establish himself in a Christian way for life! He would give up her allowance altogether in consideration of the thirty pounds.

Valentine read this letter carefully. The man was certainly feeling his way. As for giving him the money, that, of course, was out of the question. Her only chance with him, she thought, was to make him understand clearly that he would get nothing if he did not comply with the conditions. She resolved on seeing him again, though with misgivings. She wrote to him, therefore, telling him to

meet her in the gardens at the back of St. Luke's, on Saturday morning at twelve.

Mr. Carey kept the appointment. He came, however, half an hour before the time, and he was accompanied by a girl. She was dressed soberly and respectably. She wore a thick veil and carried a parasol with a black lace fringe—one of those instruments by means of which ladies can observe others without being themselves observed. They are adapted for Modest Curiosity, or for Curious Modesty, or for anything in the Detective and Secret Search Line.

'She isn't come,' said the man, looking about. 'Very well, then, she'll come directly. All you've got to do is to sit here and wait till she goes out. Then you get up and follow her, and find out where she lives and come and tell me.'

'That's right, Daddy,' said the girl, grinning. 'It isn't the first time I've done that! Oh, isn't it beautiful to see them walk right away, unsuspecting, and me on the other side of the road, quiet and takin' no notice, and generally a good bit behind, till they get home? And next morning some of us calls, and the game begins!'

'Never you mind about the next morning,' said Mr. Carey; 'that's my look-out. You just find out where she lives—that's what you're paid to do!'

'Very well, Daddy.' This girl will, no doubt, some day be taken on in the Detective Service; but at present she is the confidential employée of a small, modest, and retiring Syndicate, for whom she finds out all kinds of secrets connected with houses and their private interests; shops, shopmen, and clerks, religious professors and their private characters, gambling and betting clubs and their associates. When, after infinite pains, lies, pretences, and inventions, chiefly by the aid of this clever young lady, they have got possession of a secret, they begin to *exploiter* it for their own purposes; that is, they sell the secret or their own silence, and sometimes make considerable sums of money, and on the whole, when the young lady is active and has been fortunate, they do very well indeed. Sometimes, however, they get into Prison.

'Well, Daddy,' said the girl, 'I found out about the old woman's sons for you, didn't I?'

'I don't say you didn't. You were paid

for it handsome. But it's been no use to me yet.'

Mr. Carey left her on the seat and began to walk up and down the asphalt walk, with one eye suspiciously turned upon the policeman, much as a partridge, even out of the season, may regard a man with a gun.

Valentine arrived presently, only a few minutes late. Mr. Carey perceived, from a certain look of contumacy in her eyes, that she was likely to give him trouble. He held out his hand, however, in a fatherly and forgiving spirit.

'You have written to me,' she said, rudely refusing to take it; 'you have written two letters to me. One contained a falsehood about losing the sovereign I gave you, the other also contained a falsehood about a shop.'

'No, Gawspel Truth—not a falsehood; and it's a most beautiful chance. I shall never get such a chance again. The shop is next door but one to a Chapel, too. Oh, how handy for the Means of Grace.'

'I told you the other evening, and I tell you again, that you will have no more money from me than the pound a week I have offered

you; and if you break my conditions, you will have nothing at all. Now do you understand?'

'Well, my dear, I thought you'd say that. Most of 'em do, till they feel the screw a bit. Then they talk reason.'

'Nothing. That is all I have to say to you. Now you may go.'

'Look here, my girl,' he tried to bluster; but somehow the girl's face, or the near presence of the policeman, abashed him, and he spoke in little more than a whisper. 'Look here—your father's a ticket-o'-leave man, and your name isn't Monument at all, but Carey; and you're the daughter of a Convict and a Burglar, and you're ashamed of it. That's what you are. Very well, then, it's like this; you're ashamed of it more than a pound a week, and you've got to pay up accordingly.'

'You shall have nothing more.'

'P'raps you can't lay your hands on thirty pound all at once. Lor, I don't want to press you, and p'raps I can help you to get it off of somebody that has got it. There's a lover or a husband about—oh, I know. And he mustn't never know, must he? Husbands and

lovers mustn't know about the ticket-o'-leave men, must they? P'raps you're married and there's babies. Very well, then, naturally you don't want the babies never to learn about the great Burglar, though p'raps when they're old enough they may be glad to crack a crib and thankful of the chance. But there's a prejudice against Burglars, ain't there? You'd give a great deal not to have your father in your house, wouldn't you? Why, there, we're agreed already.'

'I suppose I must hear what you have to say.'

'Why, of course you must. Very well, then.' He coughed and looked at her with some hesitation, because he was wondering how far he might go, and what figure he might name, and he considered her dress and external appearance carefully before he spoke. The gloves decided him, though perhaps the boots helped. It is only the really prosperous who have both good boots and good gloves. Mr. Carey, an old student of human nature, remembered so much. 'I want more than thirty pound—I want a hundred——'

'Do you?'

'A hundred pounds. I'm ready to take that money, partly in valuables and partly in gold—partly to-day and partly the day after to-morrow.'

'You must ask some one else for the money then.'

'I shall ask my wife. At the almshouse.'

'You cowardly villain! Then you will get nothing!'

'I shall ask my sons then, one after the other. I know where they are, all of them.'

Valentine changed colour. The man had already found them out then!

'You see, my pretty,' he went on, with a mocking grin, 'your father isn't quite such a fool as you thought him—not quite such a fool. And he's been making a few inquiries. Joe works for a plumber; most respectable Joe is; and Sam's a schoolmaster, highly thought of; and Claude's in the Temple, where the lawyers live. As for you, my pretty, you—with your lover or your husband—I haven't found out yet, because I haven't tried. But I shall find out as soon as I do try. All of 'em will be delighted to see me, though they have cast off their father's name, and I dare say

your lover will be as pleased as Sam and Joe will be pleased when I show up.'

The girl recovered her presence of mind.

'You will do just exactly as you please,' she said quietly. 'You have heard what I had to say.'

'And you shall do just exactly as I please,' he replied with a rough oath. 'A hundred pound. That's my first and last offer. I ask no more and I take no less. I don't ask you where the pound a week comes from, do I? Very likely it's the housekeeping money, or it may be out of the till. Who the devil cares where it comes from?'

She made no sign, standing with folded hands, and eyes which looked as if she had not heard.

'It's so easy done,' he went on. 'It isn't as if I wanted anything dangerous or difficult. I'll take all the danger myself! There's lots of ways—there's a cheque and a signature—I shouldn't want any more than that. You get me a signed cheque, and I'll alter the amount —I know how to take out the writin' and put in fresh. There's a door left unlocked at night p'raps—or there's just the little straight tip

where the valuables is kept; or may be there's the least bit of help when the till's got to be cleared! Mind you, my dear, I don't value no lock nor bolt ever invented, not a brass farthing. You needn't be a bit afraid of me—not one bit. Money or money's value—it's all the same to me. Just turn things over in your mind, Marla, my dear, and you'll come to reason, I'm sure.'

'Oh!' said Valentine, 'surely this man is the most wicked wretch in the world!' Nothing ever astonished Mr. Carey more than his daughter's plainness of speech. She had even boxed his ears; and he shrank from her in cowardly terror lest she might do it again. Now, it is not often that a man can boast of a daughter who has both boxed his ears and called him names. Such daughters are rare. Even King Lear's elder daughters did not reach this level.

'Now,' she said, facing him with a resolution which he admired, 'listen to me again. I will give you no money except this pound a week. Remember, that as for getting you a hundred pounds—begging it, borrowing it, or stealing it—I will have nothing to do with it.

And if you dare to show yourself to my mother or my brothers, you shall have nothing more from me at all. Do you hear? Nothing! And this I solemnly swear to you, because I suppose you will not believe a simple promise.'

His eyes dropped, and he made no answer. Then he began to protest that he wanted nothing but an honest livelihood, and to show his repentance, throwing in the Scripture phrases which reeked so frightfully of the prison, when she interrupted him again:

'There is one thing I might do for you.'

'What is that?'

'I might send some one to you who would make you an offer——'

'What kind of offer?'

'So much a week, if you would go abroad and stay there.'

'What! And leave London, when I have only just come out?'

'Yes, you would have to leave England. It would be a liberal offer.'

'Leave England? And at my age? Never!'

'You have heard what I had to say. Now

go. Leave me here. Take your detestable presence out of my sight!'

Mr. Carey obeyed, with mental reservations about the future, and the revenge he would take on this unnatural child. He had yet, however, to discover where and how she lived, and why she was so anxious to keep the knowledge of his existence from her brothers.

As for Valentine, she felt inclined to communicate to the Policeman in the gardens certain new ideas as regards the Penal System. It ought to include, she would have told him, provision for the incarceration of such a man as this for life. He should be allowed such special luxuries as tobacco, rations of drink, and permission to keep his gas alight till—say ten o'clock at night. But he should never be allowed to go back to the world for a single day. The place of his incarceration need not be called a prison, perhaps, but a Penitents' Retreat, or some such name, so as to soften the apparent cruelty of the sentence. She did not, however, communicate these ideas to the policeman; but she left the garden and walked away. The girl with the parasol and the black fringe round it got up from the seat and went out

after her slowly. The policeman looked on and noted the circumstance. First, one girl comes to the garden with a man. Then another girl comes. Man converses with that girl. First girl waits. Then second girl goes away alone. First girl follows second. There was a little game up. But he was on duty in the garden, and he could not follow and observe.

Valentine was a very easy person to follow and watch, because she walked quickly, looked neither to the right nor to the left, and was so absorbed in her own thoughts that the woman might have walked at her very elbow without attracting her suspicions.

She crossed the City Road and walked along the street until she came to Hoxton Street, when she turned to the left. The girl followed. Valentine went on nearly to the end of the street, when she turned into a mean and shabby street. The girl stood at the corner and watched. There was a public-house in the street. Perhaps she was going there, but she was not. She entered a house exactly opposite the public-house. The spy stood at the corner, with one eye on the house, and waited, looking at the shop-windows for a few

minutes. She could not be living there—that was absurd. Young ladies cannot live in such a place. Presently, however, as she did not come out, the spy turned into the street, and as there was no one about of whom she could ask any questions, she went into the public-house and 'took' something.

'Isn't there a young lady,' she asked the potman, 'as comes and goes in the house opposite?'

'There is just,' replied the young man, who had taste. 'And what do you want with her? Because, you see, if you mean any harm to her, you'd best clear out of Ivy Lane.'

'I mean harm? Why, bless the man, I worships the ground she treads on. A sweet lady! Where does she live when she's at home?'

'Why, there.'

'Oh! Does her husband work, then?'

'Her husband? She ain't got no husband!'

'Oh! Then how does she live?'

'Go and ask her yourself,' he replied.

The girl looked into the house. It was only a mean and shabby tenement house; she belonged, then, to poor people. What was the

little game of the old man—her new friend—with this young person?

But that was no concern of hers. It was something vile and wicked, of course, because she knew all her companions were vile and wicked. She went away, therefore, and faithfully narrated what she had observed.

Mr. Carey was greatly puzzled at this unexpected discovery.

His daughter, who permitted herself such airs, and talked as if she had thousands, and looked like a lady in every particular, wearing the most beautiful boots and gloves, actually lived in a mean street of Hoxton, the meanest and also the most virtuous part of all London—a place in which he should be ashamed to be seen. And she lived in a single room, with those gloves and those boots. What could this mean?

'Pity, my dear,' he said, 'that you couldn't find out how she makes her money. For money there is.'

'If you'd told me what you wanted, and why you wanted it, I might have found more. All you said was, "Find out where she lives." Well, I have found out, and a potboy who told me nearly bit my head off for asking about her.'

'What is she, then?'

'Well, I think she's one of them which go about with Bibles, and fake up excuses for making the people virtuous. There's no end to their dodges. They're getting as artful as you and me pretty well. One of 'em collects rents in a court close by here. It's an Irish court, too. But, bless you, she ain't afraid, and they won't harm her. Well, I s'pose that young lady is up to some game of that sort, Daddy. And what game you are up to with her I should like to know.'

Mr. Carey shook his head. He was conscious of so heartfelt a dislike to all forms of religion, virtue, or morality, that he thought it must have been transmitted to his descendants. Besides, a woman to do this must be a lady to begin with, and his daughter Marla was only the daughter of a washerwoman. I am sorry to say that he placed a bad construction on the matter, and concluded that she was engaged, for purposes of her own, in some genteel game which might be spoiled by the discovery of her father's profession, and of his return to its active exercise. 'But,' he murmured, 'I'll have that hundred pound yet.'

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIENDLY FATHER.

For a whole fortnight Mr. Carey refrained from molesting either of his children, graciously consenting to receive twenty shillings a week from one and thirty shillings from the other. The reason for this modest retirement and simple content was simply that as yet he had made few friends—it takes time for a professional gentleman of distinction to find out congenial spirits of his own lofty level—and therefore he had met with no temptation for the display of that hospitality which formerly was one of his most delightful qualities. Besides, he had not yet overcome the strangeness of the world, which had changed a good deal during his twenty years of seclusion, even to the language of the fraternity, and this, I understand, undergoes a complete change in twenty years. Book language lasts, it is true, but the slang of rogues, like the

dialect of a savage tribe, is always changing from generation to generation. Mr. Carey found that the old patter, that spoken by himself in the early sixties, was unknown, and even provoked laughter among the new generation; and it distressed him that he was completely ignorant of the new idioms, and was slow to understand the back slang, the rhyming slang, and the so-called theatrical slang which are now current in Thieves' Land. Consequently he sat apart and stayed his soul with flagons, tobacco, and books. Fifty shillings a week was enough for his simple wants. Therefore it was in pure devilry and with the deliberate intention of vexing and shaming his son Claude that he paid a second visit to the Temple. The door was shut; nevertheless, Mr. Carey opened it with the help of a simple instrument which he always carried about him. When Claude returned about midnight he heard, while yet upon the stairs, the scraping, not unskilful, of a fiddle. Such a sound is strange in King's Bench Walk. Outside the door he recognised that the fiddle was being played in his own chambers, and on opening the door he discovered that his father was the musician. He

was sitting in a chair playing merrily; in his mouth was a short pipe, a bottle of wine, half finished, and a glass stood on the table.

'Glad to see me, Claude?' he asked, nodding and grinning. 'I thought you would be, so I came round. It's a goodish step from Whitechapel, isn't it? I told you I should step in sometimes. Well, you were out, so I let myself in. It's not a bit of good locking a door to keep me out, bless you. Lord, there isn't a lock in the whole country that will keep me out, and so, my son, I've been making myself comfortable.'

Claude groaned, and his father, with a smile of satisfaction and a brightened eye, for the sight of his son's disgust and humiliation affected him with a singular joy, went on with his conversation, which was a monologue.

'I picked up this fiddle on my way—bought it in Houndsditch for a sov, which you'll have to hand over, my dear boy. Have you got the money about you or shall I put one of these pretty mugs up the spout? I suppose they're real silver. Thank you! It is a very good fiddle for the money, but my hand is a little out. There's no fiddling allowed

in the jug. I'll play you something, Claude.' He played correctly, and with some feeling and an old-fashioned lingering among the notes, as if he loved them every one, Balfe's air 'Then you'll remember me.' After this he played 'My pretty Jane,' and 'Tom Bowling.'

'There, boy,' he said, laying down the fiddle, 'can you do that? Not you. Can you take the fiddle, and play a hornpipe, and make the boys dance whether they want to or not, and draw their hearts out of the women, and the tears from their eyes? That's what I could do when I was a young man. As for the girls, a man who can fiddle like me can do what he likes. Ah, Lord! To think of the old days! Can you do it? Not you. What can you do? How do you live, I say? What is your lay, now? Where do you find the money for all this?'

Claude made no reply.

Then the man filled and lit his pipe, and drank two more glasses of wine. It was Burgundy, and he seemed to appreciate it. But the wine did not warm his heart apparently, for his eyes had a devilish look in them as they fell upon Claude's face—the look of one who

considers evil day and night—the look of one who took pleasure in contemplating his victim's shame, and revenged himself at the same time for the loathing of his own presence. He already hated this son, who showed so clearly the humiliation caused by his return, and yet bore with him, and did not, as he might have done, shove him violently down the stairs. He hated him, and he rejoiced in his power of humiliating and disgusting him more and more.

'Look ye, Claude,' he said, with a full, round, and sonorous oath ; 'you may keep your trade to yourself, if you please ; you're afraid of my getting a hand in it, I suppose. But you won't keep your old father out of your rooms ; I shall come here for company and for drink—I shall come here whenever I choose. It's rather lonely where I've got my pitch, and they're a low lot about now, compared with the old pals, and there's not many of the new men that I care to know. Why, there was a man last night pretended never to have heard of the great Jim Carey. The profession has gone down : it's gone very low indeed. Any man calls himself a burglar when he's once learned

to crack a crib, and to carry a revolver in case he's heard upon the stairs. As if I ever wanted pistols!—as if I was ever heard!—as if anybody ever heard or caught me in a house! Ah! Claude, it was a great misfortune for you when your father was lagged. You'll never understand with them prejudices of yours what a misfortune it was. You've got a quick eye, and a light tread, and clean fingers. You would have equalled your father almost; you couldn't surpass him. And I'd always made up my mind what to do with you. And now it's come to this—a black coat and a tall hat—talk like a swell—lodgins among the lawyers—actually among the lawyers—my own son—Jim Carey's son—among the lawyers!—and something genteel in the book-making line. Well, as I was saying—this bottle's most empty; go and get me another. It's cool stuff, and carries a man along better than brandy. As I was saying, the profession is clean ruined by revolvers; it's getting low; there's no pride in a neat job. But there, nothing good ever came from America yet. I am getting old now, and I doubt if I shall ever do much more, my boy: but it's heart-breaking to find yourself forgotten

after all that's been done. As for work, why should I work any more, when I've a beautiful, dutiful, affectionate son to keep me, not to speak of a wife and two daughters, and two other sons, every one of whom desires nothing so much as to welcome back the fond father they have lost. He is a ticket-o'-leave man ; he is repentant, and is open to the tender influences of awakening grace, and understands at last the Christian virtues and has cast off the works of darkness. The good Chaplain says so, and the Chaplain ought to know, because he's always converting such a lot of wicked sinners, and a giving of 'em the best of characters. It's a contrite spirit—oh!—and a broken heart!'

'For heaven's sake,' said Claude, 'it is past midnight, drink what you want and go.'

'I shall go when I please. Now, about this family of mine. Thirty bob isn't enough, my son!'

'I shall give you no more.'

'Very well, then, I shall think about trying the rest of them. Perhaps altogether they would make it forty. As for the girl who lives in Ivy Lane, Hoxton'—Claude started—

'dressed like a lady, though where she gets her money from is what I do not yet know——'

'Who told you about her?'

'Never you mind. Who told me about you, and about your mother, and about Sam and Joe? I know all about the family; there's Joe—he isn't worth calling on, because he's only a working man with a family of eight. Sam, again, he's only a poor miserable schoolmaster.' (It must be remembered that Mr. Carey went into his hermitage before the passing of the Elementary Education Act, and, therefore, did not appreciate the present position of the schoolmaster.) 'He's got the parson over his head to bully him, and make him go to church and look humble. He's got nothing but his miserable salary. There's no use in worrying Sam. And your mother's in an almshouse and blind. If I go to see her perhaps they'll send her away out of the place, 'cos she isn't a widow, and make me keep her. I don't want to keep her. And there's the other girl—Melenda—and as yet I don't know where Melenda is. So you see, Claude, there's only you and your sister Marla. One of you two I must see sometimes, and I shall. Which shall

it be? All I ask, Claude, is—which shall it be—you or her? Come, now.'

'If you thrust yourself on her'—it was clearly Valentine of whom his father spoke—'I swear that I will stop my money altogether, and you can do what you please.'

'Don't you think it just possible, my dear son, that your sister Marla has got friends who would rather not know about her father? Don't you think she would come down as handsome as you've done—you and your thirty bob!—just to keep these friends from knowing? Therefore, Claude, which of them is it to be?'

'It seems as if I can't keep you out of my chambers if I tried.'

'No, my boy—you can't. Take your oath of that.' He took his two or three times over, with a glass of Burgundy to each, just by way of setting an example.

'But if you force yourself on Val—on your daughter, I shall do my very best to dissuade her from giving you anything.'

'Thank ye. You're a dutiful boy, ain't you? And suppose I force myself upon both of you?'

Claude made no reply at all.

'Eh!' he repeated; 'suppose I force myself upon both of you?'

'Then,' Claude replied, 'there will be only one thing for us to do. My sisters and I will all go away—out of the country—somewhere—anywhere, out of your reach. Sam and Joe shall have the task of protecting my mother. You may be very certain,' he added grimly, 'of the reception you will get from both Joe and Sam.'

'Nice boys, both,' said their father. 'They won't turn up their noses as if they were gentlemen. A pretty kind of flash gentleman you are!'

'Very nice boys they will be,' said Claude, 'when they hear who you are and what you want. They will astonish you by their nice behaviour. I fancy I see Sam before he flings you into the gutter for pretending to be his father, the honest locksmith. Why! we might all pretend that you are an impostor. I wish I had begun that way!'

'No, you don't, Claude.' But he looked uneasy. Suppose these sons of his should all pretend not to believe in him, there might be considerable trouble and difficulty before him. 'Don't think of that.'

'Yes, I wish I could see Sam's face when you go to him. Go to him, by all means. Or go to Joe, and then you will find out how dutiful your sons can be, and how deeply your eldest son respects and loves your memory.'

'You can talk, young 'un, if you can do nothing else. So can I. Never mind Sam and Joe; you and me will do. I will stick to you, my boy——'

'As the leprosy stuck to Naaman——'

'Quite right, Claude—always quote the Scriptures. Didn't Joe never tell you about me? Joe was—how old was Joe when I was last lagged? He was sixteen. Oh! Joe knows all about it. I saw him in Court when I was tried. It was a beautiful trial, and it would have done your heart good to hear how my counsel bowled 'em down, one after the other. At one time I thought I should have got off altogether. But it wasn't to be. There was a Providence in it, as our Chaplain said. It brought me to a knowledge of the Truth. Be not, then, ashamed of me, a Prisoner!' The man displayed a horrid aptitude in quoting the Book most read in prison. He took the more pleasure in it because it caused such peculiar

pain and disgust to his son. For this reason the historian passes over most of these flowers of speech.

'Joe,' said Claude, 'thought so highly of your profession and your career that he concealed everything from us, and bade us, on the other hand, be proud of our dead father—he said you were dead, because he wished and hoped that you were dead. We were to be proud of our father, on account of his character for honesty and straightforwardness. His character! Good heavens!'

Mr. Carey laughed; but his eyes looked more wicked.

'That was not well done of Joe. When I quarrel with you, Claude, I shall pay Joe out for that. I shall go to Joe's house and introduce myself to his wife and children, and shall tell them the whole story. It will please Joe when he comes home in the evening, won't it?'

Claude said nothing.

'And it will please you, my son, when I tell you that I have already begun practice again. Yes, in a small way—not in a low and mean way, mind you, but in a small way only.

I knock at the front door and tell the maid that the back bedroom is afire. She rushes upstairs, and I then step in and help myself. Twice to-day I did that trick.'

'Oh!'

'Then I got a book and a pencil, and I pretended to be the Gas Company's man, and went downstairs to examine the meter.'

'For heaven's sake, stop!'

'These rooms would make a beautiful fence. I'll bring the things here, Claude.'

'You shall not.' Claude's eyes showed this man that he had gone too far. He laughed, and took some more drink.

'You're capital company, Claude, if you'd drink more. That's the pity of it, you can't drink. Sit down, my boy, and let us drink together.'

'Drink together?'

'If you won't drink then, and if you won't smoke, you'll just have to listen.'

This ghastly night wore itself out at last. The man drank, smoked, and talked. He talked with extraordinary volubility. He seemed perfectly careless whether Claude were listening or not. It was sufficient for him that

he was awake. He talked, with deliberate design, on all those topics which he knew would most humiliate his son; of his crimes, bold and successful; of the changes and chances of his profession which were constantly landing him in prison; of his last burglary, when he made a splendidly daring attempt at a great lady's jewels, and would have got them had it not been for a lout of a country policeman, who accidentally stopped him, and whom he very nearly killed in the fight which followed; of his trial for burglary and violence and his long sentence; of his prison life, and his dodges with the Doctor and the Chaplain.

Claude stood on the hearthrug, without replying. The man talked on for several hours, during which Claude endured an agony. The clock struck four. Then the man rose slowly. The drink he had consumed seemed to have made no impression whatever upon him; he was not 'disguised,' his speech was clear, his bearing steady. But he looked more wicked, as if the wine had brought out upon his forehead with greater clearness the Name of the Beast or the Number of his Name.

'I shall go to sleep,' he said. 'You are

capital company, Claude, my dear boy. I knew you would be. I shall come very often.' The bedroom door was open. He stepped inside, threw himself upon the bed, without any preliminary undressing, and fell asleep in a moment.

Claude sat down with a sigh of relief. But he was too tired for any further load of shame, and he fell asleep in the chair.

When he awoke it was nine o'clock, and his laundress was in the room. He remembered his guest of the night and hastened to look into the bedroom. But the man was gone. He had taken his fiddle with him.

'Valentine,' said Claude, later in the day, 'I have something to tell you.'

'You have had something to tell me for the last fortnight. Are you going to tell it now? What is it, Claude?' She laid her hand on his arm, and looked into his face with the sisterly affection which was not counterfeited. 'Do you think we do not take notice when you look ill and worried? What is it, Claude?'

'Have I looked worried?'

'You poor boy! There has been a line an

inch deep across your forehead, and your eyes have had a distressed look, as if there was something you could not understand.'

'I don't understand it, Valentine. It is a part of the Mystery of Evil. But you—are you worried, too? Life here is too much for you. I wish to heaven the middle of October was come.'

'I am always troubled about the girls,' she replied, mendaciously. 'But I am very well. Tell me something of your own trouble.'

'I cannot, Valentine. Some day, perhaps, but not yet. I am a coward, and I am afraid to tell you. What I have to say now is, that certain things have come to my knowledge within the last week or two, which have made me realise, in quite a new sense, how I belong to the very lowest of the people.'

'Why, Claude, you have found some mare's nest!' She laughed, but she felt uneasy. Could he have learned the truth? 'You have discovered, perhaps, that you have cousins very poor. What does that matter?'

'It is not their poverty'—and then she knew that he must have learned the story of his father's life. Who could have told him?

Not the old lady! Was it Joe? Why had Joe told him?

'It is not their poverty, Valentine. I have only just learned from what dregs—from what unspeakable depths—I have been rescued—all of us have been rescued—you with us, if you were Polly.'

'Oh, Claude, do not talk like that! Dregs—depths—why these things are beneath your feet! What can it matter, now, what your relations were? You cannot be ashamed of what they are!'

'No; but of what some of them were. Would it not matter if some of them were—criminals, Valentine?'

'No, Claude,' she replied stoutly, 'not even then!'

'Nay,' said Claude sadly, 'it would matter a great deal. Such a thing as that would lay upon me a new obligation. I should have to atone and to make such reparation as may be in my power. You asked me once if I was ready to give all my life, if it were called for, to the work we have attempted. Why, Valentine, *it is called for!* The old life—the life I used to long for—the life of honourable

work and distinction—I need make no farther question about giving it up; it has already become impossible for me. It is not any longer a question of choice. Do not ask me why; but I can never again even sit down with the men who have been my friends. I must leave the Temple. I shall come to live here. Oh! I will hide nothing! If people say, "There goes the son of a—of a——"'

'Of a locksmith, Claude,' Valentine interrupted quickly; 'remember what Joe told you. Remember what Sam and Melenda believe. Think, if not of yourself, of Violet and of me.'

She knew now—she was quite certain—that, in some way or other, Claude had discovered something, if not all, of the truth.

'I do think of Violet, and of you,' he replied; 'heaven knows that. If it were only myself concerned, I could bear it lightly. But suppose Violet should find it out. And how am I to keep the truth from her?'

'I believe,' said Valentine, wise with the wisdom of books, 'that nothing is ever so bad as it seems to the imagination beforehand. Therefore, I daresay Violet and I will be able to bear it, whatever it is. Women are really

much stronger than men, in many ways, though you are so conceited over your superior intelligence!'

'You do not ask me what it is that I would conceal.'

'No; I am contented to wait. Meantime, Claude, conceal nothing if you please. I do not ask you to conceal things; but parade nothing. My poor boy! Yet, if this trouble should give us a stronger champion, we ought to be glad that it has come upon us. Clear up that clouded brow, Claude. Let us see the old light in your eyes.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DOCTOR SPEAKS.

'The Doctor is in love with you.'

This information was conveyed by no higher an authority than the ragged old man below; but it is information of a kind which is not readily forgotten, even though—as the newspapers in the last century used to say of the King of Sweden's movements—it wants confirmation. It is of the kind which makes a girl pensive. Whatever the answer she intends to give when the question shall be put to her, the knowledge that it will be put, and probably very soon, greatly raises the aspirant in the young lady's esteem. It makes him interesting; it also makes her expectant and watchful.

Valentine remarked, first of all, that the Doctor attended his patient with a regularity amounting to zeal; this in itself could not fairly

be considered a symptom. But he stayed longer than was necessary, and he always made his visit the occasion of conversation with herself. This, again, taken by itself, is not a symptom, because Valentine was the only young lady living within the boundaries of the Doctor's round; in fact the only lady he had ever known in all his life, and she was without doubt a very pleasing young lady, and it was natural that he should like to talk to her: one would not wish to draw conclusions of love from mere attraction. Presently, however, she became aware of a change in his talk; he began to speak of himself. Now this, as everybody knows, is an infallible symptom; he told her of his own position, his prospects, his history, and his opinions. He wanted, quite naturally, because he was so much interested in her, to interest her in himself. So far he succeeded, because he really was an interesting man. None of the physicians in the West End whom she had met were at all like this young Physician of Hoxton.

'Of course,' he said, one day, 'I don't pretend to be a gentleman; don't think that—I've got nothing to do with gentility, and I

don't know the manners of society. I am just a Mile-Ender—the old man keeps a shop there, and I could have become his partner if I had chosen, with a tidy income and a nice snug, comfortable life—chapel twice on Sunday, and a hot supper on a Saturday night, and all——'

'What a pity to have missed the hot suppers!'

'Yes; it's cold supper with me, every day of the week.'

'Why did you give up the shop?'

'When I was a boy, I unluckily got hold of some scientific books, and I began to read them. Nothing seemed worth looking at after that, except Science. I was lost to trade from that day.'

'And so you became a doctor?'

'Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, Doctor of Medicine in the University of London, General Practitioner in this genteel neighbourhood. This is the end of my scientific ambitions. London Hospital is not so very far from Mile-End, and it seemed to me as if the only way into the scientific life was through the Hospital. A good many scientific men have

begun that way, so why not I? I had never heard of the Scientific Schools or of University and King's and South Kensington, you see, and the old man had never heard of them either. So I became a Medico. Well, I've got the scientific life I asked for—Medicine is called scientific, I suppose—and it isn't exactly the kind of life I fancied, which is always the way. You ask the Fates for what you want, and you get it; they give it to you, and then it doesn't turn out what you thought it was going to be.'

'But you've got the most beautiful, the most unselfish life in the world?'

'Have I? Ho!' he grunted in derision.

'The most beautiful and the best; you are everybody's friend; you go about, carrying health and recovery in your hands.'

'Well, my hands are certainly occupied a good deal in making pills and compounding draughts, and there's only a measly boy, besides, to help carry those pills and bottles. So I suppose you're right. If I'd stuck to the shop I should have been measuring yards of stuff on the counter. Making pills or measuring calico, it doesn't seem much of a choice to offer a man. But the calico for Money.'

'Money!' This girl, who had so much, naturally held money in the deepest contempt. 'Money! what does such a man as you want with money? What would you do with money? Money cannot advance science.'

'There is a sense of freedom without money, isn't there? A man with empty pockets isn't tempted to buy things, and doesn't nourish extravagant desires, and can't give anything to anybody.'

'The work you do for them actually doesn't want money.'

'There you go,' replied the Doctor. 'For them! Hang it, can't a man be allowed to do something for himself? Here I am, with the wages of a mechanic, doing twice a mechanic's work! I used to be ashamed, at first, of taking their half-crowns from the poor devils—I beg your pardon—from the others, and where is the life of science I longed for?'

'Why, you have it—you must be learning something new every day!'

'Oh! the action of drugs and the symptoms of disease—yes, to be sure, whatever advances man's knowledge is good, I know,' he went on impatiently; 'of course even this is better than

standing behind a counter with a yard measure and pair of scissors. But I wanted to advance knowledge—not my own, but the world's. I had ambitions—but you don't know; women never understand.'

'We sometimes understand a little,' she replied, humbly.

'See here.' He pointed to the sick girl, who lay with closed eyes, as if she was asleep. 'This is the great mystery which men are always searching after, and have never found. I wanted to be one of those who search. Some day it will be discovered, and then we shall be like the Immortal Gods. Meantime, what are we? One after the other, for all of us in turn, the steady flame begins one day to dwindle; then it burns low; sometimes it goes on flickering for a long time. Then it goes out. Birth, growth, decay, and death. Why? We cannot tell. We are surrounded by a great black cloud, which we keep pushing back farther and farther; and it is always rolling in again. Whether it is close around us, or whether it is pushed far away, we never succeed in getting through it or looking over it. And beyond it—silence! The generations pass away,

and one after the other, we all ask the same questions, and have to lie down unanswered.'

'What is the use of asking questions which cannot be answered?'

'The use! The use! There's all the use, not for asking but for looking. Those who keep on searching find at last. All the secret mysteries of life will be found out, some time or other; and yet you think I ought to be satisfied with such work as this, while others are able to search.' He put on his hat and went away, without the usual ceremony of leave-taking. He was a very rude and unpolished person; but somehow he was in earnest. Any man in earnest is always sure of forgiveness, whatever his social sins may be.

'I've been thinking,' he said, a day or two later, 'about your notion of an unselfish life. I can't feel any reality about it. A man must work, but he ought to choose his own work. And every man must work for himself. Would you have a man really satisfied with being a General Practitioner in Hoxton?'

'If there is no choice, isn't it wisest to find out all that there is in his manner of life that is noble and generous, and so be contented with it?'

'I don't want nobility and generosity. I am a selfish creature; every man is, whatever you may pretend. Very well then. I want everything that I can't get—leisure, books, instruments, money to work with. What do I care about other people? If I cared about other people I should be contented, and then my life would be just a selfish indulgence. Let me have all I want for myself first. I will think about other people afterwards.'

'As it is, you can't have what you want, and therefore you have made the best of it, and begun to think of other people first.'

'Then, suppose I wanted'—he rested his chin in the palm of his left hand and his left elbow on his left knee, with his left leg crossed over the right—it is a meditative attitude—and he looked thoughtfully in her face. 'Suppose I wanted to make love? Life is an incomplete kind of thing without it. Incomplete with it, for that matter; but still——'

'You said the other day that men and women cheat themselves with the unreal sentiment that they call love.'

'So I did. But sentiment may have its value.'

'And you said that man's love was another name for his desire to obtain a slave.'

'So it is. But there might be women for whom one would reverse the situation.'

'And you despise women.'

'That is true, in a way—perhaps a little more than one despises men. So would you if you were a G.P. But there are women one cannot despise. With these a man would willingly exchange the illusions of love.'

'Be patient, Doctor; perhaps your day will come. Meantime, though you are such a selfish creature, you do a good deal for these poor people, to gratify your own selfishness, no doubt.'

'In the way of business. I take their half-crowns all the while.'

'Yes, I know how much you will get from the poor woman you sat up with this morning until four.'

'Way of business,' he repeated. 'I wonder who serves out the lives; I suppose they are served out by some one. So many hundreds told off for General Practitioners; so many for starving needlewomen; so many for drunken

husbands. One, just one, for Miss Valentine Eldridge.'

There was certainly very little reason why this young Doctor should look cheerfully on life. His practice was larger than is comfortable; and the larger it grew the poorer he became, which is a truly wonderful result of success. He was paid in shillings and half-crowns; he lived in a small house, with an old woman to look after him, and she looked after him badly. He made up his own medicines and dispensed them with the aid of a boy; he walked about the streets all day and sometimes all night; he made his meals and took his rest when he could; he had no time for reading, and his thirst for knowledge was very great. Tantalus was, I believe, a young and very successful General Practitioner in a poor neighbourhood, who ardently desired leisure for study and research.

He had no society; and the Assistant-Priest of S. Agatha—Mr. Randal Smith—was his only friend, and they quarrelled every time they met.

'Smith,' he said one evening when he found time for a pipe and a glass of beer (of course

Mr. Smith didn't smoke, and sported a blue ribbon as proudly as if it had been the Order of the Garter)—'Smith, did you ever turn your attention seriously to the question of Love?'

Mr. Randal Smith's pale face flushed. 'My WORK,' he said, proudly, 'compels the Celibate Life.'

'Don't talk more ecclesiastically than you can help. Mine compels the Celibate Life as well, because the income isn't more than enough for one! But I don't brag about it. Why can't a man go on through life without falling in love? Why does he ever want to hamper himself with a woman? She doesn't probably know anything; she doesn't care for the things he cares about. Very likely she's a fool! He can never be so free when he is married as when he was unmarried.'

'Perhaps,' said the Assistant-Priest, 'she has qualities which he desires to possess.'

'You don't fall in love with a pretty face—at least, only a fool does that—nor yet with a pretty figure. I'm an anatomist, and I know all about the pretty figure. It's a fine piece of machinery, I confess; but it is a great deal too delicate for the work we expect of it, and it is

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always getting out of order. You can't fall in love with a machine, or with the case they've made for it.'

'No'—Mr. Randal Smith saw his chance to make a point—'you fall in love with the soul.'

'Ah! that's your department. I never saw a soul in the dissecting-room; never heard of anybody who did. All I know is, that there are no diseases in my knowledge which are caused by the soul, so that it can't form part of the body!'

'It doesn't,' the other man replied, still getting the best of it. 'That is why you fall in love with it.'

Whatever it was that the Doctor loved, it was called Valentine, and it had a very charming face, with eyes which spoke all kinds of possible things, and especially a most beautiful sympathy, so that this young Doctor felt that he could talk about himself and his own thoughts all day long with her, and that neither of them would get tired. He, at least, would not. Men vary in their expressions of love; but a strong and masterful nature generally takes this form and demands perfect sympathy from the object of its passion. So that the

Doctor was partly right in calling Love the desire to get a slave for oneself. The thing called Valentine with which he was in love, also had a pretty figure, a graceful manner, and a highly pleasing voice.

He spoke at last. It was in the beginning of October, a week before her furlough was to expire.

'You are actually going away in a week?' he asked.

'Yes; for a little while. You will come every day to look after Lotty while I am away, will you not?'

'I will do what I can for her—or for you. Before you go'—it was in Valentine's room, but they had got into the habit of talking freely before Lotty, who seemed to take no notice of what was said by these two—'before you go, I should like you to know—just for the sake of knowing—not that it will do any good, but still you ought to be told—that there are two men in love with you.'

'Oh! Why should you tell me that?' she answered, with a natural blush.

'They are not much to boast of—only Hoxton men; but still—men.'

'Don't go on, Doctor.'

'I must now. One of them is Randal Smith. He confessed it last night when I taxed him with it, after beating about the bush awhile. He's been in love with you, he says, for a long time. Of course, he can't look at things straight, and he pretends that it's out of gratitude to you for singing and talking with his blessed boys—the humbug! But he won't tell you, because he's got to be a Celibate for the good of the Church—ho! ho!—and because you won't submit to discipline! That's what he calls confession, and penance, and Lent.'

'Poor Mr. Smith! I shall always think the better of myself, because there never was a more unselfish man, I believe.'

'As for the other man—will you guess who that other man is?'

She met his eyes with perfect frankness and without a blush.

'Do you mean—yourself?'

'Yes, I do. I don't at all understand why, but it is so.'

'It is a part of the general pretence and unreality of life, perhaps.'

'No, it is as real as—as Neuralgia, and as difficult to shake off. I don't know who you are, but I know what you are. Smith doesn't want an answer. Have you, by any chance, got one for me?'

'Only, that a woman ought to be proud, to think that two such men like her. Will you go on liking me, both of you?' She offered him her hand, but he did not take it.

'I said Love, not Like,' he replied grimly. 'Well, you've said what I knew you would say, only you've said it more kindly than I expected —or deserved, perhaps. Yet, I don't know. If a man loves a woman he can but tell her so, even if she's a royal princess. That'll do.' He rose and stooped over Lotty on the bed.

'Feel easier this morning, don't you? That's right. Had a good night? Pretty good. Don't talk much. Let Melenda come and talk to you, but don't you talk. Very well; now keep quiet. We shall soon be—quite well.'

'Doctor!' It was Valentine, as Lotty closed her eyes again and lay as if she was asleep.

'Quite well,' he repeated, with a kind of defiance. 'Asleep and well. What could be

better for her, or for any of them, come to that, poor things!'

The tears came to her eyes, but she said nothing.

'Her sorrows will soon come to an end. You have made her happy, in spite of them. Now I'll go. Forgive me.'

'There is nothing to forgive, believe me.'

'I was bound to tell you, once, before you went away. I shall never speak of it again—you know it, and that is enough.'

He looked in her face once more, from under his shaggy eyebrows, and pressed her hand. Then, as he left her and went his way, at the bottom of the stairs he tumbled over a couple of cats which were sleeping on the lowest step in the sun. I am sorry to say that he swore at those cats aloud. I have said that he was a rough and a rude young man. When he cursed those cats, he cursed his own fortune as well. Valentine heard the words and forgave them, understanding the cause. As for the cats, they knew the Doctor very well, and retired with precipitation and wonder, asking each other what in the world could be the matter with a man whom they had known and re-

spected since kittendom, as a constant and tried friend of cats. There are a great many cats about Ivy Lane—cats have taken the place formerly occupied by oyster-shells in poor neighbourhoods—but the Doctor had never before kicked a single one of them. Therefore they were naturally hurt and surprised. One more illusion gone.

'Valentine,' Lotty whispered, 'you are going away in a few days. I heard all that you said.'

'Yes, dear, but only for a day or two. I shall come back. Do not be afraid.'

'The Doctor loves you. Everbody loves you, except Melenda. And I shall soon be quite well. Oh, I know now what he means. I understand things much better now than I did before you came. Oh! before you came. If I could but see Tilly once more before I am quite well—and asleep.'

'Lotty—Lotty—my poor child.'

'Don't cry, Valentine. Perhaps Melenda will give in when I am—asleep and well—because we have been such friends, her and me. And you've been so good to me. You'll be patient with Melenda, won't you?'

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW MELENDA WAS DRILLED.

When Melenda carried back the bundle of finished work to the shop she generally returned with the money and another bundle, if work was abundant and she was lucky, by noon, or one o'clock at latest. On this occasion, which was a certain morning towards the end of September, she did not return at the usual time, nor did she indeed come back until past seven o'clock in the evening, when she appeared at Valentine's door with empty hands.

'They've drilled me,' she said, with a catching in her breath. 'They've drilled me all day long.'

'Oh! Melenda!' It was a bad day with Lotty, and she was reduced to a whisper. 'Oh, Melenda!'

'And they haven't finished yet. Don't tell

Liz, but it was all along of her button-holes. She's got dreadful careless lately.'

'What is drilling?' asked Valentine. 'Melenda, you look frightfully pale.'

Melenda was a brave girl, and strong, but the day's work, whatever it was, had been too much for her; and now she sank into a chair, and threw her hat upon the floor. Her cheeks were white, but her eyes were hot and angry.

'I'm tired, that's all. So would you be; and I'm hungry, too. No, I won't have anything out of your cupboard. There's some cold tea and some bread and butter in the other room.'

Valentine brought them to her; it was the first time that Melenda had accepted any service from her. But in taking the food from Valentine's hands she preserved her independence because it was her own bread and butter.

'What is drilling?' asked Valentine again.

'Last time they drilled her,' whispered Lotty, 'she went off directly she came home, and we had dreadful trouble to bring her round. Don't go off, Melenda dear.'

'I ain't going off; I'm better now. Don't tell Liz it was her fault.'

The trouble came upon Melenda through Lizzie's *laches*, not her own. It is not everybody that can bear a glimpse of the better life. That which poor Lizzie got caused her the most poignant envy and discontent. Very soon Valentine would go away and leave them. Then the bread for dinner would reappear, and the dainty meals which Valentine had given her would be a memory of the past to embitter the present, and the stockings and shoes and 'things' with which Valentine had replenished her scanty wardrobe would wear out, and there would be no money to get any more. Let us do the child justice; she thought, too, how the cheerful face, the kindly voice, the evening song, the lips that never uttered a harsh word, would go too, and the lodgings return to their former condition when they were all comparatively satisfied, because they knew no better. 'This is the way,' she said to herself, 'that ladies live at home, and this is the way we live,' and always in her ear the voice whispering, 'Come with me, and you shall live like a lady.' The good food which Valentine provided her, the comparative ease—because now that Lotty was off their hands they were

able to get along with less work—the better clothes that she wore, the greater attention which she paid to Valentine's example, and therefore to neatness and cleanliness, had made poor Lizzie by this time a really pretty girl. When Valentine came she was a girl with possibilities; now she was a girl with realities; her figure filled out and rounded, her cheek fuller and of a healthier hue—her eyes brighter. She represented, in fact, like any other animal, the advantages which result from good and regular feeding.

But these things made her, as well, careless in her work, and Melenda was drilled, therefore.

'But what is drilling?' Valentine repeated.

'I got there,' said Melenda, eating her bread and butter ravenously, 'at half-past nine this morning. I thought I'd be in good time. So I was. The clerk—it's the fat-faced one with the whiskers—he took my work and passed it in. Presently, he calls me and he says, "You stand there," he says. "They'll send down your money and your work presently," sez 'ee. Then he grinned, and the other girls who were standing about the shop for their

turn, they looked at each other and they whispered, "You poor thing! He's going to drill you." Of course I knew that. And so he did.'

'Oh!'

'Drilled you?' asked Valentine, for the fourth time.

'Now I'm better,' said Melenda, finishing her bread and butter. 'Coming home, Lotty, I thought I should ha' dropped.'

'But tell me what they've done.'

'Lord! you don't know anything, and you've been here nearly three months. You're real ignorant, Valentine.' Melenda, in her own opinion, knew everything. 'It's like this, you know. If the work isn't so good as it ought to be, they just drill us. Well, we can't help it. A girl hasn't got any rights, Sam says, because she can't fight for herself, and nobody cares to fight for us. The men they stand up for the men, and the women stand up for the men, but they don't care for other women. Sam says so. As for the ladies, what odds is it to them if we are all drilled to death?'

'But what is it?' Valentine asked; 'how do they do it?'

'They don't do anything. They just tell you to stand and wait, and they keep you waiting. If you go out, you're told when you come back that the work's come down and been given to another girl. You've just got to wait for your money and for the new work as long as they choose to keep you. Sometimes they've drilled a woman for five or six days, and her with babies at home crying for their food. What do they care?'

'Oh! but it is impossible. Have you been kept standing all day long Actually standing all day? And without food? Have you had nothing to eat?'

'Not likely,' said Melenda; 'neither dinner nor tea.'

'Melenda,' said Valentine, 'you must let some one help you. Oh! my dear, it is a Shame! It is horrible.'

'I won't then,' Melenda cried fiercely. 'I said I wouldn't, and I won't. I've always been independent, and I always will be.' It was her formula of consolation, and though it was no more than a fetish, it never failed.

'Independent! Oh, Melenda—what independence!'

In the morning Melenda went again to get her money and her work. Again the clerk ordered her to stand aside and wait. She was to be drilled a second day, a punishment which marked the gravity of her offence.

Melenda obeyed with an angry spot in either cheek. Some of the women about the place whispered her that it was a Shame. It was all that the women could do. 'It is a Shame,' they whispered low, so that the men should not hear, The whole history of Woman seems somehow contained and summed up in those four short words, 'It is a Shame.'

If you think of it, the chivalrous sentiment and the Christian sentiment and the humanitarian sentiment, all combined, have done but little as yet to remove the truth and force of those four little words. Everywhere the woman gets the worst of it. She is the hardest worked, and has to do all the nastiest kinds of work; she is the worst paid; she is always bullied, scolded, threatened, nagged, and sworn at; she has the worst food; she has the lion's share of the trouble and the lamb's share of the pleasure; she has no holidays; she has the fewest amusements. Even in those circles

where women do not work and are never kicked, she has the worst of it. Beautiful things have been written about womanhood, damsels, and gracious ladies. Girls do, in fact, enjoy a brief reign while they are wooed and not yet won. And after that the men take for themselves everything that is worth having, save only in those well-appointed and desirable establishments where there is enough to go round for man and wife too. But for the great broad lower stratum of the social pyramid, there is but one sentence that will express the truth. You will hear it from the lips of women and girls wherever working women and girls meet together; on the pavement and outside the shops it is cried aloud; in the shops and work-rooms it is only whispered; one short sentence, in four short words, 'It is a Shame.'

All day long to stand and wait. It seems a cruel thing. And very likely at home the children crying for their bread, or sitting empty and hungry at school, while the figures swim and reel upon the blackboard, and the teachers wonder how children can be expected to learn when they have had no breakfast and no dinner. To be made stand and wait from half-past nine

in the morning until seven in the evening. And women, my Christian brothers, are not really so strong as men, though we treat them as if they were capable of far more endurance than we ourselves ever give to our own work. It seems cruel; but then, consider, drilling is punishment. There must be punishment. And the very nature and essence of punishment is that it is unpleasant. In the good old slavery times women were tied up to the post and lashed, which hurt them a good deal, and even inflicted deep flesh wounds and caused indelible scars. But these heal up; the pain of being drilled for three or four days in succession is certainly a great deal worse than the pain of being lashed for three or four minutes, and the injuries it inflicts on a girl are not skin and flesh injuries and do not heal up, nor can they be forgotten in a day or two. Quite the contrary; these injuries last a whole lifetime, and sometimes lap over to the next generation. There must, however, be punishments in every trade; how else are you to get work done properly? You cannot fine a woman whom you have already engaged according to the strictest principles of sound political economy

on the Law of Elevenpence-Ha'penny ; you are not allowed by foolish modern laws to flog her, not even to correct her with a cane, nor to box her ears, nor to kick her ; it is no use turning her off, because the next girl will be no better ; you may not put her in the stocks or the pillory ; you may not duck her ; civilisation, humanity, Christianity, and political economy agree together in forbidding all these things. But they agree in allowing an employer to pay starvation wages to his girls, and by way of punishment, when he pleases, to drill them. It is a small and miserably inadequate kind of punishment. Let us pity the poor employers ; they have nothing else left.

On the third day she went again.

Again she was told to stand aside and wait.

Again she obeyed, and prepared submissively for a third day of patient suffering.

Only one hundred and fifty years ago, when maid-servants or workgirls committed any fault, it was customary to beat them with sticks. As it was the custom no one took much notice. One of the sights of London was Bridewell Prison, where visitors and idlers

went to see the women flogged. Sometimes, again, the women were placed in pillory and so exposed to the derision of the multitude. It seems barbarous to us when we read of these things. We have now, no doubt, cast away for ever such barbarities. Of course we have—we are now so considerate and kind to women that we never overwork them, never pay them wretched wages, and are constantly careful that other people shall treat them with equal consideration. This is an age of humanity. We even go too far in our resolution that there shall be no cruelty. If a schoolmaster flogs a boy we invent stories to stimulate and goad the public wrath. We say that the schoolmaster has even cut the boy's toes off in the zeal of his *argumentum baculinum*. We will have no boys whipped, no donkeys kicked, no dogs or cats ill-treated; and it is commonly reported that the cases of the fox, the hare, the rabbit, the weasel, the stoat, the pheasant, the partridge, and the grouse, are shortly to be taken into serious consideration. Wherefore it is absurd to suppose that there can be any cruelty in drilling.

Girls who are drilled do not cry out, to

begin with, nor do they write to the papers. They know very well that, if they do venture to complain, they will get no more work. Besides, if it were cruel, if it were not for their own good, it would not be done. Like many other necessary chastisements, however, drilling has its disagreeable side. Those girls, to begin with, who habitually work sitting all day, feel extremely uncomfortable after standing for a couple of hours. The discomfort increases to the point of pain, and from pain to torture if it be prolonged sufficiently. When the torture does begin, the girl feels first of all grievous pains in her limbs; she shifts her weight from one foot to the other, her feet swell, her back and shoulders ache, her head becomes an aching lump of lead; she is nothing at all from head to foot but a collection of aches and pains; there is no part of her which does not give her pain; every bone is aching, every muscle is drawn, every joint is swollen, and you may observe, if you take the least interest in a girl who is being drilled, that, after an hour or two, her cheeks have become flushed, her lips tremble, her hands are shaking, and her eyes are unnaturally bright.

There is another thing. Workgirls do not generally breakfast off anything richer or more substantial than bread, or bread and butter. At stroke of noon they are ready for their dinner, which may be bread with a piece of fried fish—it is cheap and very nourishing dipped in oil, as the Beni Yakub love it—and sometimes of bread and butter with tea. At one o'clock, if this meal has not been provided, they are desperately hungry; by two or three, they are faint and sick with hunger. By the evening, if they have had nothing since breakfast, they are devoured by that pain which was once poetically and happily likened unto the gnawing of a wolf at the intestines by a man whose name has been forgotten, but who had personally experienced this pain, and had also been chawed by a real wolf—I think it was in Epping Forest, about the time of King Athelstane. This man, who lived to a great age, and now lies buried in Greenstead churchyard, beside St. Edmund's oaken church, always declared that he greatly preferred the real animal to his imitator.

All day long the people came and went in the shop, each one about his own business,

nobody regarding so insignificant a thing as a young workgirl standing still and submissive; no one, indeed, knew or guessed or cared to think that here was a girl who was aching in every bone and sick and faint with fatigue and hunger, waiting for money due to her and for work promised her, who had so waited two days and was now waiting the third day. And the hours when one is being drilled move on so slowly. They go too slowly in the City for those in the ranks of Clerkdom; far too slowly for the youngsters who want to be off and away, using up the last of the autumn evenings upon the bicycle in the roads about Leyton and Wanstead; far too slowly for the young man who longs for the evening, when he may walk and talk with the girl who is going to marry him as soon as he reaches the income of a hundred and twenty pounds; too slowly for him who is already married and now draws two hundred, and has a house at Leytonstone, with a garden and children five. But the hours went much more slowly to Melenda than to any of these. The fat-faced clerk already mentioned—he with the whiskers—went on with his work and from time to time turned his

eye upon Melenda. Because it was the custom, he thought nothing of the punishment. Just in the same way, when the Romans nailed a man on the cross, the thing was so common that none of the passers-by gave a thought to his agony. He hung up there, over them, sometimes enduring his agony for two or three days, while everybody went on below just as if the man were lying on a bed of roses. The soldiers on guard rattled their dice and told their stories and sang snatches of song; the boys played with their knucklebones and quarrelled and fought at the foot of the gibbet; the women carried their fruit to market on their heads, and hardly looked up; the happy lovers passed hand in hand beneath the man who would love no more, and on whose drooping head were the dews of death; the scholars walked by disputing. There was a man being slowly done to death upon the cross—well, it was the custom. This clerk was like the Romans; I dare say he knew that drilling was painful, but it was the custom. The girl had left at home, very likely, brothers and sisters who were waiting for the money and the work, and were, meantime, without food: perhaps he

understood in his dull and unsympathetic way that hunger is an extremely painful thing. But it was the custom. He was only doing his regular work. He was no more moved than the Roman soldiers, or than the schoolmaster is moved by the sad face of a boy kept in, or than the beadle was wont to be moved when, in the days of his now lost magnificence, he walked, gold-headed staff in hand, beside the wretch who was being admonished at the cart tail by the nine-tailed vengeance. It was the custom.

Out of so many workgirls, there are always so many careless girls; therefore so much drill, so much starvation. It was nothing but the necessary discipline of the Establishment. The clerk was really a very kind-hearted person, who would not willingly give anyone pain. He spoke with the greatest abhorrence of the ruthless Russian and the tyrannous Turk; if he had any money to spare he would subscribe to all kinds of virtuous and benevolent things, such as the Cruelty to Animals Society; and as for Vivisection, words fail him when he even thinks of it. One is anxious that this gentleman, who is still

comparatively young, should not be misrepresented, and therefore it should be added that he is a member of a surpliced choir, in which he sings tenor, and that he belongs to a Guild, and sometimes is allowed to put on a long cassock, which makes him completely happy. The chiefs of the Establishment have houses at Buckhurst Hill, Stoke Newington, and Finchley. They are all most kind-hearted men. If their children were kept waiting for breakfast a single quarter of an hour, they would turn every servant—man Jack and maid Jill—out of doors; if any of their own girls were kept without food for a whole day, they would fall into apoplectic fits. It is needless to say that they are diligent at church and chapel; they approve of all good works; on the question of discipline they speak vaguely; on that of woman's wage they cling manfully to the great sheet anchor of trade—the Primal Law—the most beautiful and most beneficent of all Laws—that of Supply and Demand. Theirs, you see, is the Demand; the girls furnish the Supply. In the evening the chiefs, who make a succulent luncheon at one, go home every man to a handsome dinner at half-past seven, picking up something on their

way at the fish and game shop outside Broad Street Station. At the moment when their gongs proclaimed the serving of dinner, Melenda would be allowed to go home to her bread and tea.

I believe that a two-days' drill is considered severe. Melenda's case must therefore have been very serious indeed, for she was drilled the third day, and perhaps it was intended that the drill should go on for a day or two longer, but an accident, the nature of which you will learn immediately, prevented the continuance of the punishment. It was not that Melenda 'went off,' or fell down, or flew into a rage and delivered her mind and was consequently excited. She did none of these things. She stood perfectly quiet and waited. The clerk began to think that punishment had gone far enough, but it was not by his orders that girls were drilled. That was done in a department upstairs, which took about as much human interest in the girls as a Board of Magistrates laying down rules for Prison Diet, or a Board of Guardians ordering a costume for workhouse girls, or the Admiralty issuing orders for the British sailor.

Valentine it was who ended her punishment for her.

When they found that Melenda did not return by the noon of the third day, Valentine declared that the thing should no longer be endured.

It was nearly one o'clock. Melenda stood alone in a kind of corner, out of the way of the people who kept coming and going. She now hoped for nothing but the stroke of seven —still six long hours distant—and stood swaying herself gently from side to side, to ease some of the pains which racked her limbs. When she saw Valentine at the door she changed colour, and was ashamed. This was indeed, she reflected, a beautiful kind of independence—independence to be justly proud of! Valentine looked about the place, saw Melenda standing in her corner, and then addressed the man who seemed to be in office. It was, in fact, the clerk whom Melenda called 'him with the fat face.'

'Is it, pray,' she asked, 'by your orders that girls are tortured in this place?'

'I don't know what you mean,' he replied.

'Is it by your orders, then, that the work-girls are drilled, as you call it?'

'No, it isn't. The orders come from up-stairs.'

'Will you tell me where I can find the chief partner of the house?'

'Oh! come,' said the clerk, laughing, 'that's too good, that is! You don't expect him to bother his head about a workgirl, do you?'

'Will you take me to him?'

'Well, no—I won't, if you come to that. It's more than my place is worth.'

'Will you tell me his name?'

'Why, of course; all you've got to do is to read the name on the brass plate at the door.'

He dimly perceived, through the fog of daily routine and custom, which clouded a perhaps otherwise fair understanding, that here was a young lady, and that there was going to be a row.

There was, but not much; because you really cannot expect the Senior Partner in so great a House to trouble himself about a mere insignificant London workgirl. You can't sell

a workgirl as you can sell a roll of silk; you can buy her, it is true, and you can buy her cheap, and you can use her up quick; you can drill her if she is careless; you can pay her the wages of competition—in some confusion of ideas, Valentine thought these must be the wages of sin turned the other way about. All this an employer can do with a workgirl, but he cannot sell her; so that he has naturally no direct interest in her, except to get as much work out of her as he can while she lasts. And this, of course, he does.

In ten minutes' time Valentine reappeared. With her was an elderly gentleman of benevolent aspect.

'You shall see for yourself,' she said, indignantly. 'You cannot disclaim the responsibility for abominable cruelties committed in your name. You shall deny them if you can!'

'Cruelties! Really, my dear young lady—cruelties in my House! It is absurd. Let us see these cruelties.' He looked at her card—'Miss Valentine Eldridge.'

'I am a daughter of Lady Mildred Eldridge,' she said, instinctively getting at a weak place. 'Now, sir, will you please to tell me whether

it is by your approval or by your orders that this girl has been ordered to stand here for three days, from half-past nine in the morning till seven at night—nearly ten hours each day—without being permitted to leave the place or to sit down for three whole days? To *stand* all day without food from nine until seven! Would you dare to use your own daughter so?'

'Really, this is very——'

'For three days! Oh!' Valentine was now so indignant that she said more than was wise. 'Do you understand at all what it means to stand for ten hours in one place? Do you understand what it is to go without food for a whole day? Do you know that she has been kept from the money owing to her all this time? You have, I suppose, the right to pay her starvation wages and to overwork her. Have you the right to torture her?'

'One moment, Miss Eldridge.' He called the clerk and retired up the shop in conversation with him.

'I hear,' he said, presently returning, 'that the girl was not told to stand, but to wait; there has been nothing to prevent her sitting down, or going out for dinner or tea, had she

chosen; her work was kept back for three days as a slight—a very slight and inadequate—punishment for very culpable negligence. Under these circumstances I trust that you will recall the harsh expression.' He spoke with great dignity, but his cheeks were red.

'I will not. Your excuse is a miserable prevarication! It is false that the girl could sit down or go out. She has been deliberately tortured. You make a practice of torturing the poor helpless women you employ.'

'At all events, it shall not occur again with this girl. She shall receive whatever money may be owing to her and she may go. We will strike her name off our books,' said the Senior Partner. 'Since discipline is construed into cruelty, and kindness into torture, you had better, Miss Eldridge, take your *protégée* elsewhere. I am sorry I cannot help her any longer.'

Nothing could have been grander than the way in which he delivered himself of these words. He took off his hat and retired. It was not until he was gone that Valentine found any reply, and then it would have been unequal in dignity to that of the manufacturer.

'Now you've lost your work altogether,' said the clerk. 'Lord, what a fuss to make about a day's drill!'

'Will you find a chair for the next girl you drill?' asked Valentine.

'Well, Miss,' he replied—mindful of the Senior Partner's words—'I told her to wait; I didn't say stand! Is it my fault that there was no chair?'

'We are always made to stand,' said Melenda. 'Never mind—there's other places!'

They went away, Valentine feeling miserably guilty. She had fallen into a rage, and before a man known all over London for active benevolence, and she had gone to his private room and accused him of cruelty and of torture, and of underpaying his girls and overworking them. Valentine, for once in her life, showed —to put it mildly—an immense capacity for indignation. She startled the good old man, and when she offered proof of her words, he could not choose but follow.

He had a dinner party that evening, and I think he must have been feeling uncomfortable, in spite of his grave and dignified language, because he talked a good deal about the

question of women's wages. They were necessarily, it was agreed by all, ruled by the state of the labour market first, and the production market next. And there was only one feeling, that it was most desirable to find some way in which the wages of women and girls could, without violation of Political Economy, be improved. He did not tell the drill story, because there were one or two awkward points about it. Besides, this young lady certainly had friends, and her friends might write to papers. Now, there is nothing in the whole world which men of all ranks, classes, trades, fortunes, or professions, dread more than the publication of 'trade customs'; because, somehow, from the fee of a barrister down to the bill of a plumber, so many delicate questions can be raised, and so many awkward questions may present their sharp and spiky points; and it is not enough to feel, as we do feel, that we are all in the same boat. This makes it, in fact, worse, because if anyone in his wrath should happen to bore a hole in the boat on account of another man's sins, down we all go together. The benevolent Senior Partner could not get out of his mind the white face and

trembling limbs of the girl he had been drilling. They made him feel actually uncomfortable. Besides, he was afraid of the newspapers. Perhaps, however, nothing more would be said about it.

'You've got my work took from me, Valentine,' said Melenda, not ungraciously. 'Never mind—you gave it him hot! He didn't like it, though he bounced it off. There won't be much more drilling done there for a month or two. But, Lord! it isn't him you should blame. He don't know nothing about it. It's upstairs where the orders for drill comes from.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

MELENDA IS VANQUISHED.

Thanks, therefore, to Valentine's well-meant, but perhaps injudicious, interference, there was now no work to do, and the girls were idle. Of the two evils, compulsory idleness, with no money and therefore no food; or compulsory drudgery, with very little money, and very little food; perhaps the latter is the lesser, though workgirls differ in opinion. Lizzie, leaving the care of the future to Melenda, went rambling about the treets, appearing regularly at meal-times in Valentine's room; if she loved anything it was idleness, and as she could now get well fed without doing any work, she was contented with the present, and not anxious to begin again at the button-holes.

Melenda it was who went seeking work, and, as generally happens in such cases, found none. There were already, as she very well

knew, far more seekers than work for them. This is the hopelessness of women, that there are so many who seek for work and will take it at any terms. There are, for instance, those who ought not to take it at all, such as girls of the better sort who live at home and will do work for any wretched pay in order to earn a little money for dress; then there is the married woman, who will take work for any pay in order to buy a pair of new boots for her boy: these crowd the shops side by side with the women whose very livelihood depends upon their work, and are obliged to take whatever work and whatever pay is offered.

It was a slack time, too, and perhaps the history of Melenda's late dismissal was noised abroad to her discredit among establishments which reserve the right of torture. However that may have been, Melenda got no work. She was greatly magnanimous. She never charged Lizzie with the carelessness which brought on punishment; more than this, she did not suffer Valentine to feel that she had been indiscreet in her treatment of the Chief Partner. And she was too proud to complain, and so sat in misery and hunger alone in her

room, except when she sat by Lotty's bedside. Why was she so long in getting well, when she had plenty to eat and nothing to do, and rest for her poor back? Yet she showed no signs of getting better, and only spoke in a whisper, and grew daily thinner and more wasted.

'Melenda's got no money at all left now,' said Lizzie, after four or five days of this vain and fruitless seeking. 'Yesterday there was twopence: to-day there is nothing, not even a loaf.'

She made this remark as if it was a matter of quite small importance. At a certain depth, the fact of being penniless and out of work is not so uncommon as to excite either wonder or compassion. Besides, there had been penniless times before, and they had pulled through somehow.

But Valentine hurried to Melenda's room. She found her sitting beside the table; there was nothing at all on the plate where the loaf was wont to stand; the lid of the teapot was off; there was no work on the table; the room was quite neat and tidy. Now for a workwoman's room to be tidy means that there is no work. The girl's eyes were set hard, and

when she saw Valentine at the door they became harder. 'What do you want here?' she asked. 'I haven't asked you for any help, and I won't—I'll starve first.'

'Oh, Melenda, you are starving already! You have starved because you were so proud. My dear, if you will not accept, will you at least borrow?'

'No, I won't have anything from you.'

'You have had a great deal from me already. Take a little more.'

'What have I had from you?'

'You have taken for your friends what you refused for yourself.'

'Lizzie may do what she likes. As for Lotty——' Her voice broke down, and the tears came into her eyes. 'I've done what I could for her. All I could do I've done; I'd ha' worked my fingers to the bone for her. But that wouldn't ha' done her any good. We've been friends for eight years.'

'You have, indeed!' said Valentine.

You know and have read how in certain wild parts of the Earth, where the policeman and the Ten Commandments which he guards are both unknown, and the choicer blessings of

civilisation have not yet arrived, and even Lynch is as little studied as Coke upon Blackstone, men join hands and become sworn friends and allies against all the world. But, as in our modern times the word friendship has come to mean so weak and feeble an alliance that your friend will not hesitate to stab you in the back with an epigram, or to ruin your fondest hopes for his own advantage, it has been found necessary to make use of another word. These men in the wild places are therefore brothers. We ourselves—we of civilisation and slang—when we mean that a man is a real friend, call him affectionately a pal. It is expected of a pal that he will stand by one both in public and in private. This differentiates him from a friend.

Workgirls, however, are friends, not sisters or pals. Like the men in the wild places of the Earth, where every stranger is an enemy, and every creature one meets is a wild creature, they stand hand in hand; everybody is an enemy; those who employ them rob them; those who sell them food rob them; they are robbed in their rent, they are everywhere and in everything robbed, stinted, and starved.

Political Economy is dead against them—who can stand up against Professors? They are weak of body and have no power of speech; they are as dumb sheep, for they do not even bleat in complaint, but together—two and two—they are strong in patience: together they can suffer, together they can bear the life which we of the Christian brotherhood have assigned to them in these happy and religious days of charity, faith, and hope. In this Saturnian age, when we are all brothers and sisters in love and sympathy, standing together hand in hand, they can find something like contentment among the potsherds and the mouldy crusts.

'It's me, after all, that she could have done without,' Melenda went on, 'and you that's done everything for her.'

'You have taken this service from me for her sake,' said Valentine; 'my dear, take another service—for her sake—I do not say for your own.'

'You want me to take your food and your money. I won't, then; I'll starve first! I am starving! Oh, there's a pain like a knife inside me! Go away and laugh at me!'

'Oh, you are too proud! Melenda, would you disturb poor Lotty's last days? Will you let her die in sorrow because you are so hard?'

'Her last days?' Melenda sprang to her feet. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean that she is dying. She may last a week, or even three months, but she is dying. Nothing can save her now. Oh, Melenda, your friend is dying!'

'Lotty dying? Lotty dying!' she sank into her chair in despair. She knew already that Lotty would never recover. But between going to die and actually dying there seems so wide a space.

'She will very soon pass away from us, my dear; away from the crowded street and her life of toil and pain. Would you keep her? You would not wish that she should stay. She is going to some better land. While she lives, Melenda, my sister, let us make her happy. She can only be happy if she knows, when her eyes are closed at last, and she has no more pain to bear—that you and I will love each other, for her sake — for her dear sake, Melenda.'

'Lotty—dying!' she murmured, as if she had not heard.

Then Valentine threw herself at her feet and caught her by the hands.

'Oh! my dear—my dear! Do the thing—for her—which Lotty most desires. "If only," she said this morning, "if only Melenda will leave off being hard-hearted." The Doctor has told her that she will die, and she is not afraid, poor dear. But she is troubled for your sake. Forget your angry thoughts and angry words, Melenda; they shall be as if they never had been spoken. Try to believe that I love you. My poor, proud, brave girl, you have suffered so much and have been so strong. Let love break down your pride!'

The tears fell fast on Melenda's hands.

'What's the use?' she cried, 'oh! what's the use? Lotty's dying, and I am all alone. You are a young lady; I don't believe you are my sister Polly at all. Sam says it's the other, because she's like Joe's Rhoder. How can you love me even if you are Polly? Look at your clothes, and look at mine.'

'My clothes! What have clothes to do with it? Do you think I have watched you

every day for three months and seen how brave you are, and how you have worked for Lotty, and how patient you have been with Liz, and your resolution, and—and everything'—she could not refer to evenness of temper, but there are always some points which must be omitted—'and not love and admire you?'

'Oh! what's the use?' cried the girl; 'I'm always cross and ill-tempered, even with Lotty.' She slipped one hand from Valentine's grasp, and passed it over her streaming eyes.

'Try me, dear,' said Valentine.

She threw her arms round poor Melenda's neck, and kissed her a dozen times. 'I told you when I came,' she said, 'that perhaps I was your sister Polly. Perhaps I am not after all. Polly or not, we are sisters, you and I, always sisters. Shall we promise?'

'If—if you like,' said Melenda, with such sobs and tears as become the vanquished; 'if you like.'

'Then, my dear, sisters must do everything they are told to do by each other. You will order me and I will order you. First, I am going to dress you.'

Melenda was conquered.

Valentine ran into her own room, and came back with a bundle of things.

'Do you think I am going to have my own sister go about in such shocking rags as these any longer? Take off your frock this minute, and—oh, the ragged petticoat! Here is one of mine, and a frock, and a pair of my own stockings. Everything has got to be changed. You are not quite so tall as I am, but the frock is short for me. There, my dear, the stockings fit you like a glove. You and I have both got such small feet, which is almost a proof that I am Polly, after all. The frock is a little loose in the waist—that is because you are so thin—but you will fill out very soon now. Oh! my dear, what sticks of arms you've got! Mother says she can count every rib in your body, and I am sure I could. That comes of eating so little. To-day you shall have chops, and to-morrow steaks, and you shall never—never—never go back any more to your horrid cold tea and bread and butter, mind that. Now there's your hair. Do you know, Melenda, you have got much finer hair than most girls? See what a colour it has! Artists would give anything to paint that

beautiful dead gold hair. What a pity you cut it in the front! You will have to let it grow again. Why, it hangs down below your waist. Now sit quite steady, my dear, and I will dress it for you nicely, so as to hide the nasty fringe.'

With true artistic feeling, Valentine carefully combed back the fringe, and plaited a braid of the thick red hair to hold it back in its place, and rolled up the great mass of hair behind. When it was completed the effect was wonderful. For the first time there was displayed a broad and white forehead—for the first time Melenda's eyes showed at their best—strong and steadfast eyes, deep set, though now red with tears; for the first time her face looked as Nature intended it to look, not beautiful, but clear, capable, and trustworthy. In the grey dress which Valentine gave her, with a red handkerchief in front, with a white collar and white cuffs, and her hair dressed in this new fashion, fringe hidden and forehead displayed, no one could have taken her for the ragged workgirl of that very morning.

'Oh! good gracious!' Melenda cried, when Valentine completed her operations by bringing her the looking-glass.

'There,' said Valentine, 'you look like—like a Professor of Mathematics,' she added with a little hesitation; certainly Melenda in her new dress had the air of great capability. 'Exactly like a Professor of Mathematics, and you ought to be at Girton College. There isn't a Senior Wrangler anywhere who could look so clever if he tried his utmost. Nobody would believe that I had such a beautiful sister. Come, dear, we will go to Lotty.'

'Lotty, here is Melenda; we are friends, as sisters ought to be. I have been dressing her. Now you are not to talk, but you may whisper, if you please, that you are glad. What shall we do with her?' She went on talking because Melenda was blushing like a bride in her new character of Melenda the vanquished, and the tears were very near the surface. 'What shall we do with her now that she has no more work to do? As for the old work, that is done with. There shall be no more button-holes. First of all, Melenda has got to nurse you, Lotty, hasn't she? That will be work she will like, and perhaps now she is at your bedside, Lotty dear, you will get well soon. Oh! and she has had no breakfast yet. Here

is a box of sardines, and here is bread. I will make some fresh tea in a minute. Eat at least half the sardines before you say a single word: mother says you never did eat enough. Now isn't the flat kettle a capital thing? Here it is boiling already. Why, how in the world could Lotty and I enjoy our breakfast and dinner when we thought of your bread and tea? There! Now I push the table closer so that you needn't move out of your chair, and oh! Melenda! don't begin to cry again, or we shall all of us——'

It is a pitiable thing that three young women cannot feel unexpectedly happy without crying over it. Perhaps, in Melenda's case, the sight of the food which she had refused so often was an outward and visible sign of her changed frame of mind; a holy sacrament and token of a solemn covenant, meaning reconciliation and affection. She was not one to go back upon her word: she was vanquished: her independence was gone. If Lizzie had been the girl concerned, we should have added that she was hungry. But with Melenda that circumstance mattered nothing. She was always hungry; she had been hungry for eight years; she was

hungry day and night, and except sometimes on Sunday, all the week through. However, she bowed her head and took her breakfast, and choked over it, while Valentine recovered slowly.

No one, unfortunately, noticed Lizzie.

She stood looking on with wonder and jealousy and a certain fear. Melenda was dressed like a young lady—a young lady of a shop. Her hair was brushed back, she was no longer a workgirl: no workgirl wears a white collar and cuffs, no workgirl was ever yet known to have her hair so dressed. Therefore, Lizzie, who had a quick, if not a logical mind, jumped at once to the conclusion that when Valentine went away—Melenda had always insisted that she would soon go—she would be left behind, alone. No one wanted her; no one took any notice of her; she was not Valentine's sister! And Lotty was going to die; they would both be gone, and she would be left quite alone.

She stepped out of the room, put on her ulster and her hat, and descended into the streets, her poor little brain in a tumult of envy, jealousy, and apprehension.

'And now,' said Valentine, cheerfully, 'you

will stay and nurse Lotty, won't you? If there was anything you would rather do than that, you should do it. But I know there is nothing. Here is her medicine and the glass. Don't let her talk too much, but you may talk to her. Tell her about the man at the factory, the Chief Partner, you know, and how he pretended you could have sat down if you pleased, the old Humbug! Let her go to sleep if she can, and if she is thirsty, here are her grapes, and don't go into your own room till I give you leave. Obey your sister, my dear!'

Presently they heard footsteps on the stairs and in the other room. But Melenda obeyed. The steps came and went, twice or three times. When, in the afternoon, Valentine took Melenda back into her own room, the place was transformed; they had scrubbed the floor and cleaned the windows, washed the woodwork of the door and cupboard, they had pasted up the paper where it had fallen, they had put up a new blind and pretty curtain, they had brought new chairs—the old wooden bed was gone, and a new iron bedstead was in its place, with new sheets and blankets. There were flowers on the table—even the rusty grate was cleaned up

and polished; and a piece of carpet lay upon the boards, which were hardly yet dry.

'There!' said Valentine; 'this is an improvement, isn't it, my dear? The past is quite gone; let us make the future as unlike it as we possibly can, so that we shall never be reminded of it.'

'But my work!' said Melenda, feebly.

'We shall find work. Do not be troubled about work.'

Thus was Melenda subdued, dressed, and promoted. In the morning she was a Young Girl, in the afternoon she was a Young Person. Students of modern English will recognise the distinction. The next step is, of course, that to the rank of a Young Lady, which is obtained by getting employment in a shop, or behind a Bar, or in a Show. There is not any other promotion open to working women beyond and above this rank of Young Lady. They are never, never by any chance, made Duchesses or Countesses, or anything. This is, no doubt, a shameful wrong, but it is not yet felt; and until an evil has become a crying evil, and a cry has become a bitter cry, and a thing that is felt and acknowledged to have become a disgrace to the

country, we are resolved not to mend it or to mind it.

In the evening, Melenda went out, as usual, by force of habit. The street market was in full swing; the roadway as well as the pavement was crowded with people—women with baskets, men loitering along with pipes in their mouths, everybody making rough, good-natured jokes; the boys whistling, the men at the barrows and stalls shouting; everything going on just as usual. Strange! These things amused her no longer—and the people seemed not to know her; they did not chaff her, nor did the boys push her, nor did the young men address her with words of impudent familiarity. Quite the contrary. They made way for her, as if she had been a young lady. And for the first time in her life, she did not like the crowd. She left the street, therefore, and went back to her own room. It looked so pretty and so much like Valentine's, especially when she lit the lamp with the coloured shade, that she wondered how in the world she could have gone on so long in such a grimy den! Thus easy is it to take an upward step. And may every Young Girl speedily become a Young Person, like Melenda, if not a Young Lady!

When Lotty fell asleep, Valentine came to talk with her. They had such a talk as made the girl's heart glow within her. For Valentine spoke of a divine future, in which the women who work—yea, the very lowest and poorest, such as she and her friends had been, shall work in happiness, not in misery, for a wage which will keep them in comfort, and for hours which will give them leisure; when there shall be no drilling, and driving, and swearing and abusing! And when there shall be time to look about and enjoy the world, while yet the pulse is strong and the blood runs swift; and when women who work shall be able to read books as well, and to learn music, and to visit green fields and forests.

'My dear,' said Valentine, 'remember that the time must come. Perhaps we shall not see it, but let us help its coming while we live. The future belongs to those who work. But the girls cannot do much by themselves—they must have two things—the help of the working men, and that of the women who do not work.'

Then she accused herself, and her own hardness of heart—her apathy and selfishness, in having lived for one-and-twenty years without

so much as thinking of the women who work, and, with herself, she accused all those women who do not work and do not think. 'Why,' she said, 'it is forty years since the most generous hearts in England showed a way, and preached it as if it were a new Gospel—yet I think it is only a part of the old; the men have followed it, but not the women. Oh! Melenda,' she cried, 'it needs nothing but determination that the women shall have the proceeds of their labour. And we are too lazy and too indifferent to care for them.'

These were stirring words, such as Sam would use. Melenda understood very little of what they meant; but they rang like words meant to put people in a rage, and therefore she liked them.

'We will start our co-operative work here, Melenda. You shall be the forewoman, when you have learned a little more. Oh! there will be plenty of work for you; we shall work together, and Claude will work with us. I shall want you to give me more than I can give you—all your time, all your cleverness, all your skill. Why, what can I give you, my dear, in return? And then, when we are quite ready

with our workshop and our girls, we shall go to the ladies, and tell them what we are going to do, and ask them if they will come to us instead of going to the shop; and perhaps the shops will come to us instead of going to the factory. There must be some sympathy, somewhere in the world. But yet, after all that has been said and written about it, we seem only just beginning. Claude says that the history of all great things is the same: first it is the man who finds the truth and preaches it to deaf ears, and dies; and then the little school of disciples which survives him and preserves his teaching; and afterwards, the martyrs, and the preaching to the four winds of heaven, and to a great, stupid world, which will hear nothing, in spite of its long ears; till, little by little, the words begin to take effect, and produce their fruits!'

The Doctrine of Co-operation was difficult for Melenda to grasp. She only understood, of work, that it must be 'given out' in the usual manner and by the customary machinery of clerks. There are many points of distinction between the masculine and the feminine mind: as that the woman is not happy unless she is quite

sure and certain, and that the man gets along very comfortably under a sense of uncertainty ; also that any man who disagrees with a woman is, to her, an utterly contemptible person, while to a man, he is only a person with a curious mental twist. But the most distinctive of all these points is, that a woman never invents anything, or wants to change anything, or to improve any methods or ways of doing things. In order to illustrate this proposition, consider the common housemaid, the common household cook, and the household nursemaid; the first of these has never been known to show the smallest invention in the laying of a fire, nor the second in constructing a dish, nor the third in dressing a baby.

Melenda, therefore, could not at first understand how the Golden Age may be restored. Few, indeed, are those whose imaginations can overstep the bounds of custom and sally forth into the world where women are actually paid for labour, at a price which is not ruled by competition. In that world, if work is slack, there will be savings to fall back upon ; there shall be no grinders and drivers, and no woman shall be able to undersell another. In that world

will spring spontaneously all those beautiful virtues, which can only flourish in physical comfort, sufficiency of food, and freedom from anxiety. And in that world, the girls will refuse to marry early, and the men will not ask them.

'But they will always try to beat us down,' said Malenda, incredulous of any Golden Age.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIZZIE'S TEMPTATION.

LIZZIE went down into the streets unperceived, and with a sense of having been driven out. To such girls, who are perfectly conscious of their poverty and their personal insignificance, there is no greater pleasure than 'notice,' and therefore no greater blow than neglect. She was jealous—she had taken Valentine's dinners for nearly three months—she had never shown any pride about accepting presents; yet no fuss was made over her. And the moment Melenda gave in, there was as much rejoicing as there is over a sinner who repents. Melenda, the penitent, was caressed and cried over, while no one took the least notice of herself.

Besides, Melenda would not be a workgirl any longer, that was quite clear; no workgirl could be dressed in that way, and Valentine was

her sister. And Valentine was going away. Melenda always said that she would go away and forget them, and Melenda was never wrong. She said so herself, which proved the truth of the statement, and Lizzie always believed her; well, then; now that Valentine and her sister were friends, they would go away together.

And Lotty was going to die.

Everybody was agreed that Lotty was going to die; she knew it herself, and talked about it. It is strange how quickly a girl may become accustomed to the contemplation of approaching death. The Shadow hangs over the house; everybody feels it, the sick and the well, the patient and the nurses. Day follows day and the Shadow remains or becomes deeper, but Azrael lingers, and when he comes at last, though his terrors have vanished, the surprise remains that the end should be so soon.

Lotty would die. Lizzie knew that she might linger on. Would Valentine leave her and forget her? She ought to have perceived that this was impossible, but she did not perceive it. In her trouble and perplexity, the foolish girl pictured herself nursing her friend through her last days and then left

alone, without even Melenda. What should she do? Who would find for her the work—hard work, but better than none—that Melenda had hitherto found? How was she to live? She had no other friends in the world—her father counting as nothing—except the two girls. They had been sufficient for each other; and now the little circle was going to be broken up. Then, again, who would share a room with her? To the London workgirl, the thought of sleeping all alone in a room is full of terrors. If it was dreadful to think of the night, how much more dreadful to think of the day! For the last two months she had been as happy as the unwonted sense of physical satisfaction which comes of good and abundant food can make a girl; it makes an enormous, an inconceivable difference. She knew, Melenda said so, that it would not last, but she was satisfied with the present. If you give ever so little happiness to these poor girls, starved of joy, they blossom like flowers in sunshine. Now she was like the butterfly who feels the first chill winds of autumn and knows that summer and sunshine are over. To the butterfly there is no other chance or hope. For

Lizzie there was what seemed to her ignorance not only a chance, but a certainty. It was a letter—the last of a dozen letters—received two days before. She had read it a dozen times at least and knew it now by heart, yet she read it again a dozen times.

It was nothing less than a love-letter. The man who wrote it had told her over and over again the same thing, yet words which are written seem to mean more than things which are said. He loved her and he thought about her day and night. That was what the letter said. But he had told her so day after day, walking beside her; he whispered it to her in the crowded streets; he had told her so in the quiet side streets—there are side streets in Hoxton, where, but for the children, who do not count, and are besides sometimes in school, and the costers, who are not always bawling, there reigns a perennial silence; he had taken her hand in his and kissed her, telling her so, not in a rough way as working lads use, but daintily, and yet with a curious coldness as if it wasn't quite true. It was not quite true, but he told her this because he wanted her; and besides, it was nearly true, for the girl

had grown wonderfully pretty. He really did, as he told her, desire above all things to get that face and those beautiful eyes into his own studio. Lizzie knew very well that her face and her eyes were beautiful; she did not know how much her beauty had grown since Valentine found out and provided for her an infallible remedy against the dreadful disease known to girls as 'falling off.' The remedy consists solely of a good dinner taken daily, with a reasonable breakfast and a hearty supper. It is sovereign for colouring the cheeks, brightening the eyes, putting in dimples here and there, and filling out the figure. So that Lizzie, who had been nothing but a thin, hollow-cheeked, and hollow-chested girl such as may be seen by thousands, only with large and beautiful eyes, was grown, in three short months, tall and well-proportioned, of good carriage, with soft and dreamy limpid eyes and a mouth that looked as if it might smile, but could seldom laugh, and a face of infinite possibilities. In her speech, too, she had amended, being an imitative animal. But her ulster still covered a ragged frock and her hat was shabby to the last degree. This lover of

hers went on to assure her that he wanted to do nothing all his life but paint her face and eyes—the hands, he reflected, but did not say so, would have to be chosen from another model ; but he could not even begin until she made up her mind to give up her present life, and to trust herself entirely to him. Was she afraid of him ? Well, you see, Lizzie was afraid of him. He was a gentleman. Work-girls are horribly afraid of gentlemen, though they pass it off with cheek and chaff ; and though in every workshop there is a tradition that once there was in it a girl as poor as themselves, whom a most beautiful gentleman, young, handsome, and passing rich, picked out from all the world, and loved her better than he could have loved any number of Countesses, and married her, and made her happy ever after. They tell the story, but they forget altogether how horribly dull it was for that girl after her marriage, with nothing to talk about, and none of her old friends, and the best company manners to be carefully maintained all day long. And naturally, they do not understand how dull it was to the unfortunate young gentleman, and how devoutly

he wished ever afterwards that he hadn't done it, but had taken up instead with even the least desirable of the Countesses. Lizzie, however, found this gentleman lover horribly dull company. She had nothing to say; absolutely nothing. She was afraid of him and of his cold polished manner.

Was she afraid to trust him? It was a most eloquent letter. That could hardly be the case; she should have everything that the heart of a woman can desire; she should lead the softest and easiest of lives; her only duty should be to sit to him; her days should be full of light, sunshine, and Art. Here Lizzie felt that fear again; for what was it that he was always talking about? What was this precious Art? She knew nothing about Art; she cared less. One evening her friend took her to the Bethnal Green Museum, where she saw big vases and paintings. He said that was Art, but it made her yawn. She would have to make him do without Art. She should, the letter went on to assure her, be always dressed in the finest and the prettiest. Her hands, which were now spoiled by rough work—making button-holes in thick coarse

shirts does really pull the fingers into all sorts of shapes—should grow white and delicate as a beautiful woman's hand should be.

There was never yet devised by the subtlety of Man or Evil Spirit a more terrible temptation than this which falls in the way of such girls as Lizzie. Fortunately for man, no such temptation is possible for him, though he is often enough tempted to enact the part of the Serpent; else the lot of humanity would be far more wretched than it is. It is a temptation which assails a girl partly through her womanly pride of beauty and love of admiration; partly through her natural desire to escape the hard life which has been her lot and to enjoy the easy life of which she has only caught a glimpse; and partly through her youthful desire to enjoy the sunshine and to have a little play, and to gather some of the flowers of the Spring.

Even if Lizzie had been less ignorant; even if she had known what would have followed; even if she had seen, as in a map, the years of her life stretching out before her—even if she had seen herself sinking deeper and deeper into misery—yet think what a temptation! Even if she had been restrained by religion—

but she had no religion ; or by education—but she had not been educated ; or by love and respect for her friends—but Lotty was dying and Melenda would be taken from her, and then she would have no friends.

There is no such temptation in all the world, unless it be the temptation to steal for one's starving children. Against a life of penury and privation, a lot of plenty ; against hard work, idleness and leisure ; against the fierce anxieties and struggles of competition, ease and freedom from any anxiety.

Alas ! Lizzie, left alone, was not strong enough for such a temptation.

Let us bring out the woman who gives way to the Place of Stoning. Tear the veil from her face and make her stand before us trembling, crying, full of shame and terror and despair. The matrons, of course, are armed with the largest and the sharpest flints. But see—the men sit down and refuse to throw a single stone. Even the employers of women and the manufacturers, and those who are governed by the Law of Elevenpence-Ha'penny, refuse. And the women are ashamed to begin. Then she steals away unharmed. And always

in the City within its grey walls, almost in sight of the Place of Stoning, sit Lizzie's friends, sewing button-holes as she did, making shirts, machining men's coats, rolling cigars, fashioning match-boxes, sorting paper, confecting jam, all starving, all hollow-eyed, all sad of heart and heavy of limb, and all getting their Elevenpence-ha'penny a day, when they are in luck. And in the midst of all the Serpent, twined about the branches of the apple-tree, continually whispers to those who are young and pretty and will listen, his soft and mellifluous promises.

Lizzie suffered the temptation to assail her all day long. She wandered about the streets, now buffeted and beaten by the Tempter, who reviled her for her stupidity in resisting; now contemplating with shrinking terror the picture which he held up before her imagination of a wretched girl alone in a wretched room, with no work, no money, no food, no friends, no light, alone in the world. How could she go on living so?

'Why,' said the Tempter. It was not the Serpent actually visible, but a memory of certain words which had been said to her by the man

who followed her and wrote to her those letters. 'Why, what do you know in this God-forgotten place of what is done at the other end of the town? There are girls, not half so pretty as you, whose photographs are sold in every shop and put up in every window. They can get what they please to ask at any Theatre, just for going on the stage to be looked at. Why, you want nothing but a little better dress to outshine them all.'

Then she remembered how he took her into one of the little draper's shops, of which there are so many everywhere, and picked out a bright-coloured kerchief, one of the cheap things in jute which look so pretty. 'Take off your hat,' he said.

She took it off, and with a dexterous hand, which showed practice upon more than the mere lay figure, he twisted the kerchief round her neck, and over her shapely head, so as to let the curls of her fringe play about the folds and to set off the singular beauty of her eyes with a frame rich and full of colour. 'Look,' he said, showing her the looking-glass. Then he took off the thing. 'Put on your hat. Look now.'

She shuddered, because it seemed to her as if all her beauty lay in the crimson handkerchief.

'Don't think,' he went on, outside the shop. 'Don't think that I shall let you go upon the stage. I shall keep you all to myself. The world shall only see you in the exhibition of my picture. I can wait for you a little. But don't try my patience too long. As soon as you are tired of privation and toil, come to me.'

She ought to have put the thought behind her; it should have been treated as a thing impossible to be even considered. But this she did not do.

Late in the afternoon she went into a small stationer's shop, the place where her letters were received for her, the only letters she ever had from any one. Her mind was made up. She would struggle no longer. After all, she would be better off than some, because he was a gentleman.

For a penny she bought a piece of note-paper and an envelope, the shopwoman kindly allowing her to use the counter and her own pen and ink for nothing. Here she wrote a letter in reply. It was the first time she had

ever answered her letters, which always proposed a meeting, so that they could be answered by word of mouth, and her answer hitherto had always been a hesitating 'No.' It was a very short letter, because she had never written a letter before in all her life, and perhaps, she will never write another. It was also spelled in a manner disapproved by the great Butter, and disallowed at Spelling Bees, but the spelling we may alter.

'Lotty,' she said, 'is going to die. Melenda is going to be took away. She's got a new frock, and her fringe is brushed back. So I shall be all alone. I can't stay all alone. So I will come to you to-morrow. Tell me where you will meet me.—Your friend,

'LIZZIE.'

She addressed and posted the letter—this took her last penny. It was then two o'clock. He would get it in two or three hours. She would have an answer the next morning. Now when she had irretrievably promised this thing, because nothing is so hopelessly past recall as a letter dropped in a post-office, she felt strangely agitated. She was afraid to go home. Like

Eve, she wanted to hide herself. She had no more money, and was getting horribly hungry, but she was afraid to go home. Her eyes, she thought, would tell the tale of what she had promised. They would guess it from her cheeks, which were burning. If they guessed it, what would they say? If they actually found it out, how would Melenda rage, and how would Lotty cry, and how would Valentine look at her with grave eyes, full of pity and of wonder, under which she would sink to the earth in shame? When principle and religion fail, you see, the opinion of one's friends may still be useful.

It was quite late, nearly eleven o'clock, when she got home. Her father's candle was burning, and she opened the door and looked in. He was sitting in his chair, motionless and abstracted, as he sat every night.

'Can I do anything for you, father?' she asked. It would be the last time she would ever do anything for him.

'Is that you, Lizzie?' he replied, shaking his head as one who rouses himself. 'No, my dear, thank you. Why should you do anything for me? I've never done anything for you,

have I? And now, I never shall. You ought to have had a better father, child!'

'Never mind, dad; it isn't your fault that you're so dreadful poor.'

'It is my own fault, I suppose, that I have a daughter to share my poverty. Never mind, child. You have found a friend at last.'

'If you mean Valentine, then you're wrong. She's going away. She's going to take Melenda with her and Lotty's got to die.'

'If she is going away, she will come back. She has been here this evening. You will have no more trouble, Lizzie. As for me—— the Bishop is very ill. His sons are sent for. I do not know what will happen; but you can do better without me. There will be no more slavery for you, child.'

There would not, she thought; but what he meant she knew not.

'The Lord,' he went on, 'cursed mankind with the curse of labour; the profit of the earth is for all. The Preacher said it. Yet there is the work of the wicked and the work of the just. And there is a vanity, saith the Preacher, that is done upon the earth; but there be just men to whom it happeneth

according to the work of the wicked. That was not quite your father's unhappy case, my daughter, but something like it. And as for you, your toil has been for the wicked man. Henceforth it shall be for the righteous woman. That will be your happiness.'

She could not understand one word. It was his wont to speak in this kind of allegory, and generally she did not try to understand. But this evening, of all evenings, after what she had done and promised, what did he mean?

'Never mind the Preacher, father. What do you mean?'

'She will tell you herself. Go, child. I told you that the Bishop is dangerously ill.'

Lizzie hesitated. It was the last time that she would see her father. She felt sorry for him, with his long grey hair and feeble limbs and his dire poverty. She lingered a moment. It was cruel to leave him, but she could do nothing for him, nor he for her. She shut the door and went upstairs. Melenda was in the room. Gracious!—what had happened? She was reading a book, rather ostentatiously perhaps, but it was the first time for eight years, and Melenda felt that the thing gave her dignity;

and by the light of a most beautiful lamp covered with a most beautiful red-coloured shade; and there were white curtains to the windows, and a carpet on the floor, and a bright new bedstead. Lizzie gasped. 'What does it mean, Melenda?'

'Lizzie,' said Melenda, who was not at all the kind of girl to practise virtue passively, and was an ardent missionary, whatever views she might adopt; 'Lizzie, it's time you cured yourself of walking the streets till midnight. It isn't respectable.'

'Well, Melenda, only last night you were out yourself. What's up now? You and me are respectable, I suppose, though you have combed back your fringe. What's come to the room?'

'She gave us all these things. They are all from her, and they're all for you and me, Liz. I'm not ashamed any more to take her presents, and I don't care if you do throw them in my teeth, after all I've said. I've given in. They're for you and me. Everything's new, even new sheets to the bed.'

'For you and me? Isn't she going away then?'

'Yes, she's going away in a day or two.'

'And ain't you going with her?'

'No, you and I are going to stay and nurse Lotty. The Doctor says as soon as possible she's to go to the Isle of Wight, he says, and she may last through the winter, with care, he says. You and me will take care of her.'

'And where's the money and the work to come from?'

'She'll find the money and the work too. Oh, Liz! such a fool I've been! She's full of thought for us; she's the best girl in the world! Sam says the other is Polly, because she's like Joe's Rhoder. But I don't care—I shall never care about the other—the one who cried!'

'It's all for you—she doesn't care about me.'

'Yes, she does, she cares as much for you as for me, which shows that she can't be Polly. Don't get jealous, Liz, there's a good girl. Let's be happy while we can, and have no more tempers! I know I have a bad temper—but then we've all been so hungry, and Lotty's been so bad—poor Lotty!'

She paused and wiped away a tear.

'She's got a new frock for you, Liz. She's

been talking about you all the afternoon, and after tea she took a cup down to your father, with a plate of meat, and talked with him, and told him what she was going to do for you —and came upstairs crying! Why, you didn't think we should go away and leave you all alone, did you, Liz? Well! I wouldn't have thought that bad of you—never—I wouldn't! You know she's coming back again, and then we are going to set to work—somehow—to make a business like the men, or co-operate somehow—I don't know how. It's the ladies themselves who are going to manage it. She says if the ladies had made up their minds years ago, we should all have been paid fair wages by this time. But they'll do it now, or else she'll know the reason why; and there's to be no more drilling, and plenty of work for everybody, and good wages—that's what she says.' It was not exactly what she said, but it was near enough. 'Not,' said Melenda, descending again from the imaginative to the practical, 'not but what they'll go on trying to beat us down, if they can.'

Lizzie made no reply, but proceeded to go to bed. And then, whether through the

strangeness of the new bed, or her hungry condition—for she had eaten nothing since breakfast—or the discovery that she had been wrong in her assumption, she lay awake half the night; and when she fell asleep, it was only to dream that Melenda was pursuing her with a long stick in her hand, and an infuriated countenance—and that Lotty was weeping, and Valentine pointing the finger of scorn, and all Ivy Lane looking on, while they cast her out.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO DEFENCE.

'This,' said Valentine next morning, 'is our last day but one together.' They were all at breakfast—Melenda with them for the first time.

'But you won't be gone long,' said Melenda.

'No; I shall come to see you nearly every day, until I come to live with you again.'

There was something the matter this morning with Lizzie. She would eat nothing, and, when Valentine said she was coming back again, she took up her cup of tea and choked over it, which was strange, because Valentine's departure for two or three days hardly seemed to offer an adequate cause for this emotion.

'I do not know when I shall be able to live here altogether, but that is what I shall try to do. Then we will get more ladies to come here, and we will make our own Society in

Hoxton. Instead of everybody living together, all in one part of town, we ought to separate, and make settlements in different parts of London. Then there would be a chance for better things, and Art, perhaps, and Culture.' Sometimes Valentine would talk in this unintelligible fashion, but the girls listened without laughing at her, which would have been rude, or questioning her, which would have been uninteresting. 'As for you, Lotty dear, I shall come to see you as often as I can. I am only going to Park Lane, which is not more than two or three miles from here, though they think it is two or three hundred miles by distance, and several centuries by time. But then they are dreadfully ignorant in Park Lane.'

'Why didn't you tell me yesterday?' cried Lizzie, with a sudden outburst of passion. 'Oh, if you'd only told me yesterday morning!'

'My dear child, does it matter much? I am very sorry, if it does matter, that I did not tell you yesterday.'

'If you'd only told me!' she repeated; 'if you'd only told me!' What was the matter with the child?

'Since it is the last day but one, and

to-morrow I shall have a great deal to do, and Lotty has had a good night, cannot we go somewhere together? Melenda can leave Liz to look after Lotty. We will go to Tottenham first, and spend the day with mother, if you like, and look at green fields and the River Lea —shall we?'

'I can't look after Lotty,' said Liz, with burning cheeks. 'Oh, you mustn't go away and leave Lotty by herself.'

'Where are you going, then?'

'I'm going—I don't know where I am going!'

She sprang to her feet and ran into the other room.

'Stay here, Melenda dear,' said Valentine. She remembered the Doctor's warning, and ran after the girl. 'Lizzie!' she cried, catching her by the arm, 'you must tell me what you mean—where are you going? Why can you not look after Lotty? Does Lotty know why?'

'No, no, you mustn't tell Lotty; please don't never tell her!'

'Does your father know?'

'He won't ask after me—he won't miss me. Don't tell father. I must go!'

'Then I shall go with you; I shall not let you go out of my sight all day long.'

Lizzie sat down. The eyes that she feared were upon her, and, as she expected, they were full of grave reproach.

'Where are you going, Lizzie?'

'I thought I was to be forgotten and left alone. What is it to you? I ain't your sister, like Melenda. You don't care for me like you do for Lotty. If I'm left alone, with no work, I shall starve. Let me go; it's nothing to you.'

'It is everything to me, Lizzie. Do you think we do not care for you? Why, after all these years, when you have worked with Melenda and Lotty, ever since you were a child, do you think they do not care for you? Tell me, what folly is it that you have committed?'

Lizzie hung her head guiltily.

'I know that you have been seen more than once, walking with a gentleman. What did he say to you?'

'He wanted me to go away and be his model. He wants to paint my face and eyes. Well, then—what's the harm?'

'If there is no harm, why didn't he come here and ask you openly, before Melenda and Lotty?'

'Oh!' the girl began to cry. 'I said I couldn't never leave Lotty and Melenda. I told him so twenty times—I told him so; but he wouldn't take "No" for his answer. And he knew where to meet me, and sometimes, before you came, when I was dreadful hungry, he'd give me a chop for dinner. But I wouldn't take his money. Oh! don't tell Melenda; I think she'd beat me, she'd be in such a rage. And don't tell Lotty, because she'd cry.'

'Lizzie, you've been worse than foolish! But there is something more to tell.'

She felt those eyes, greatly superior, upon her, and she confessed the whole.

'Then he began to write letters to me. Oh! beautiful letters; and the day before yesterday there came another; here it is.'

She drew forth the letter, of which we know, from her pocket and gave it to Valentine.

'Am I to read it?' She opened and read it through. 'My dear, it is the letter of a bad man—a wicked and deceitful man. What he says is false. It is false that you are the most

beautiful girl in the world. Oh, what nonsense! there are hundreds and thousands prettier than you, in this place only. It is most wicked to flatter a girl in this extravagant way. And how can he love you? He calls himself a gentleman, I suppose; he is a man of education; and you, my poor child—what do you know, and how could you talk with a gentleman so that he should pretend to fall in love with you?'

It will be remarked that Valentine had not yet learned everything; and that, as regards the science and practice of love, she was still in that happy state of ignorance where it is believed and accepted as a maxim that a gentleman cannot possibly fall in love with a girl below himself in the social scale. Most young ladies believe this, even after their brothers have got engaged to barmaids.

'You don't love him, Lizzie? You can't love a man, you know, unless you are his equal, and can understand him!' Which also proved that she was as yet inexperienced in the ways of love and in the workings of the human heart, which does sometimes refuse, if history hath not lied, to recognise the artificial distinctions of birth, wealth, and education.

'You don't love this man,' Valentine repeated.

'I don't know. I am afraid of him.'

This confession was really, though Valentine did not know it, a most extraordinary and almost unique instance of a girl in Lizzie's class being able to explain or disclose her mind at all. Most girls are absolutely unable to detach even one of the fine, confused variety of feelings which agitate their minds when a wooer comes to them. Lizzie was flattered by the praise of her beauty; she was honoured by the admiration of a gentleman; she was tempted by the offer of the 'easy life'; she knew that her lover was handsome, well-dressed, and of good manners. But she was afraid of him. I suppose the reason why she confessed that fact to Valentine was that fear, of all the contending forces in her brain, was the strongest. 'I'm afraid of him.'

'Why, then, there is not much harm done,' said Valentine with a sigh of relief; 'if you are afraid of a man you cannot love him. If a girl loves a man,' she went on, like the Philosopher on the seashore, picking up shells and feeling

after knowledge in the unscientific, præ-Baconian method; that is, without the making of experiments—'If a girl loves a man, I suppose she is attracted by him; she cannot, certainly, be afraid of him; she must long to talk with him, and to hear him talk. Do you long to talk to this man?'

'No; I can't understand what he says. It is all about Art, and what people should do for Art. He says we must all give ourselves to Art—I don't know what he means, but he is always saying it.'

'Then of course you are not in love! Well, go on. You have something more to tell me. Where were you going just now?'

'I thought you were going away with Melenda, and Lotty was dying, and I should be alone. I couldn't live all by myself, and there is no work.'

'Yes, my dear, you were very foolish. You ought to have trusted your friends. But you know better now. Now go on, and tell me all.'

'I'll tell you, only don't tell Melenda and Lotty—I'm afraid you will tell them.'

'No, I will not let them know if it can

possibly be avoided. But you must tell me the whole truth.'

Confession is said to bring in some troubles the greatest relief possible, especially to the feminine mind. But as yet the Apostle's injunction has never been perfectly carried out, only partially even by the Wesleyan Methodists, who, I believe, are supposed to confess to one another in open meeting of the church members —but I doubt the fullness and reality of their confessions. As for confession in the ecclesiastical way, in a hole and corner in the dark, and through a square aperture in the wall, and to an unknown man beyond, that, to an outside heretic, does not seem to meet the Apostolic precept. Lizzie found in full confession the greatest relief. She poured out the whole story, down to the very words of his letters. Besides, she was in a great fear that the gentleman would make her keep her promise, even if he had to drag her away; and Valentine was like a strong fortress of protection.

'And he'll be waiting for me—and perhaps he'll come to fetch me—and what shall I do? And what will Melenda say?'

'Poor child!' said Valentine. 'It was a

dreadful temptation, my dear. Never tell anybody this—keep it buried and forgotten. I will help you through. But never, never speak to a gentleman again.'

They went together to the stationer's shop, where the letter was lying for Lizzie. Valentine opened it. First there was a bank-note for five pounds in it, and then a brief letter, directing the girl to buy, with the money enclosed, a few necessary things, and to meet the writer at the gates of St. John's Church that morning at twelve. Valentine kept the greater part of the letter to herself, because it contained references to beautiful eyes, which might have weakened Lizzie's repentance. After a surfeit of sweets, more sugar is undesirable. There were also expressions of contempt for her recent work, which were as well left unsaid. Then Valentine began to consider what was best to be done.

'Come home with me,' she said; 'let me bring you safe home first. My dear, you are like a deer escaped from the eagle's clutches, or a lamb from the wolf. He would have torn you to pieces with his cruel teeth. Hold my hand tight, you poor, silly child, and thank

God that you told me everything and were stopped in time!'

Lizzie made no reply, and they walked back, hand in hand, and both with hanging head and flaming cheeks, for the cloud or shadow of shame was upon both their hearts, and one of them thought that her dream was come true —that the very children of Ivy Lane were going to call out upon her, and that Melenda was waiting for her with wrathful eyes and scornful words and cruel blows.

'Come in here,' said Valentine, as they entered the house; 'come into your father's room. It is a wretched room, is it not? He is miserably poor. You would have left him to his fate, in his poverty and his old age, without one friend to help him and not one to love him and to console him. He is ill—any sudden excitement or sorrow will kill him. If he were to learn that you had left him and run away to strangers, and to your own ruin, he would most likely die from the shock. You would have killed him! From this you have been saved——

'Upstairs, Lotty is on her death-bed. The end may come to her any day. If she were to

learn that you had left her without a word of farewell, and run away, the end would come very quickly. You would have killed her, too. From this you have been saved!'

. . . . .

Let us leave them together.

We generally think that the priest, because he hears no end of confessions, and knows such a quantity of wickedness, makes the best admonisher unto godliness. In the same way, the solicitor, who becomes intimately acquainted with all possible forms of roguery, or the Police Magistrate, or the schoolmaster, or the policeman himself, or even the Professor of Roguery standing in a neat uniform at the treadmill, ought to be good admonishers. For my own part I think that the grave and serious remonstrance, with womanly tears and sympathy and kisses, of an innocent girl might, with such a girl as Lizzie, be worth the admonitions of a hundred priests. And it is to be hoped that the words which poor Lizzie heard that day may sink into her heart and bring forth fruits of righteousness.

. . . . .

It was an hour later when Valentine and

Lizzie went upstairs. There were signs of recent tears in Valentine's eyes, and Lizzie was crying and sobbing still.

'Oh, Lotty!' she cried, throwing herself upon her knees and clasping her hands—'But you must never know——'

'This foolish girl,' said Valentine, 'actually believed that we were going to leave her all alone here! I have been scolding her; but we must forgive her, because she is so sorry for her want of confidence. Melenda dear, don't say a word to her about it. Lotty, you will forgive her, won't you? And you must keep her here all day—it shall be her turn to nurse you.'

At twelve o'clock, Valentine kept Lizzie's appointment for her. She had no other directions than to meet an unknown gentleman at the gates of St. John's Church at noon. This, however, was most likely a sufficient indication, because gentlemen are not common in the streets of Hoxton at any hour, and a gentleman waiting about a street corner is easily distinguished. She arrived at the trysting-place a few minutes after the hour, and there was already a gentleman standing on the broad

pavement, outside the railings. A man, at least, was there, dressed like a gentleman. He was, no doubt, the WRETCH who had written those letters. There could not be two gentlemen, each with an appointment for the same time, in the same place—and in such a place! A hansom cab was waiting close by, evidently for him and for his victim.

The girl's heart beat fast. She would have liked to say something, but she could not trust herself. The man was looking in the opposite direction, but he turned as she neared him. Good heavens! It was none other than Mr. Conyers.

'You!' she cried.

'Miss Valentine!'

'You? Oh! is it possible?'

She remembered now, that she had met him once before, nearly on the same spot. He was confused then; he looked more confused now.

She had no doubt, not the least doubt, that he was the man whom she had come to find.

'You are waiting for some one,' she said. 'You have got a cab waiting, too!'

He made no reply.

'You are waiting for my friend, Lizzie. I

have brought you back the bank-note which you sent her. She will not keep the appointment.'

He took the bank-note.

'I asked her,' he said, 'to let me paint her face.'

'I have read the letters,' Valentine replied, 'in which you asked her. They are in my hands. Go——'

Mr. Conyers was a man of considerable impudence; but there are times when the most brazen impudence must break down. No living man, for instance, could stand unmoved before the scorn unutterable, the condemnation unpitying, of a young lady, for such a thing as this man had attempted. He made no reply. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, that could be said. She had read his letters.

'Go,' said Valentine, pointing to the cab.

He turned and got into his cab without a word of explanation or excuse. She had read his letters! After that, what room was there for defence?

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALICIA.

'To Russell Square,' he shouted to the driver.

It was in Russell Square that Alicia lived, in one of the largest and finest houses, full of the most solid furniture, and crammed with pictures —pictures in every room and on every wall, as one might expect of one who was the widow of a dealer in pictures. Jack Conyers hated the house, and the furniture, and the pictures, because they all belonged, somehow, to the life from which he had vainly attempted to escape. Those game and fruit pieces in the dining-room, those landscapes in the drawing-room, those portraits—not family portraits—on the stairs, the massive furniture, all alike spoke of money and of trade, and he desired to belong to the world of money without trade.

Well, that was over now; the morning's

work had effectually demolished any chance of that; he must think about it no more.

And after making everything ready for the grand coup! Violet was certainly Beatrice. He had established, in his own mind, so many points of resemblance between her and the portraits of Sir Lancelot, and so many between Valentine and Claude, that he had no doubt at all on the subject. And now to be caught, actually caught, like an offending schoolboy, by one of the two girls concerned, in such a business as a love affair with a workgirl—a thing so unworthy of a man of Light and Sweetness and Culture; so common, so Philistine, so vulgar, and so low! And his very letters read—the thought of those letters made his cheeks to flame and his nose to feel hot. And that the thing should be discovered on the eve of his great coup only three days before the disclosure of the secret! But the damning thing was the fact of the letters—Valentine said that she had read all his letters. If it had not been for the letters he would have brazened it out. What business had she to read letters not addressed to herself? But women have no honour. They were, in fact, letters of the kind

which cannot possibly be explained away or forgotten or forgiven—letters to a common working girl, dressed in a shabby old ulster and ragged frock, who called him 'Sir,' unless she plucked up courage to utter some delicate street joke, some cry of the gutter. Now there is this curious and dangerous quality about such letters that, whether a man addresses himself by love-letter to a shirtmaker or to a Countess, incontinently he gets carried away by the enthusiasm of beauty and the magic of imagination, and becomes extravagant. Therefore, Jack's letters to poor Lizzie might have been written to Violet, so high pitched and so serious they were. And, apart from this other side of the matter, which was bad enough in all conscience, this unhappy young man felt that he had made himself ridiculous. No doubt Valentine would show those letters about.

A good morning's work. The best house on his list closed to him. Worst of all, if Alicia heard of it most likely she would be lost to him as well.

Alicia was out. Jack waited for her; and while he waited he wrote a short note to Lady Mildred. It was not a pleasant note to write;

but it was better to withdraw of one's own accord than to be kicked down stairs.

'Dear Lady Mildred,' he said: 'When I spoke to you at Ilfracombe and opened, as I then thought, my whole heart to you, I did not know, nor could I possibly foretell, that I had made the most terrible mistake. This is the case, however, and I have no other hope than to throw myself on your mercy and ask for forgiveness.

'I have long loved another lady, and I have now learned that in certain conclusions I had too rashly drawn, concerning her affections, I was wrong. Fortunately, I have said nothing to Miss Violet on which I can reproach myself. Again I ask your indulgence, and remain, dear Lady Mildred, yours very sincerely,

'JOHN CONYERS.'

Not a pleasing letter to write. But it had to be done. Better to preserve the appearance of walking out, than to be turned out. I do not think it likely, however, that he will ever call upon Lady Mildred again!

Alicia returned rather late, and hungry for luncheon. She was a lady who was always hungry for luncheon.

'You here, Jack? I expected you about this time. Let us have lunch, my dear boy—you've got such a long face that I know exactly what you've come to say. You shall have some fizz, to give you Dutch courage! Don't be more ceremonious than is necessary. I should like it best if you would just say, "Alicia, my dear, I've concluded to come down." But I suppose that won't do for you—it isn't grand enough.'

They had luncheon together at the great mahogany table, among the pictures of game and fruit. How in the world can a man ever become a leader of Art, Culture, and the Higher Criticism, who sits daily among these pictures, and has married the widow of a picture dealer?

'Now, Jack,' said the widow, 'will you have a cigarette, or will you talk without tobacco? I don't mind, you know.'

Jack proceeded, with some solemnity, to put his case in the most favourable light possible. He said, but the lady laughed aloud while he spoke, that he must appear to have acted an unworthy part; he could not, in fact, understand his own blindness; for three months he had been as one who struggles against the

overpowering force of conviction; he had tried to persuade himself that his happiness lay elsewhere. 'This illusion,' he concluded very gravely, 'this illusion, Alicia, has now been dispelled.'

'Has the young lady refused you, then?'

'No! My proposal for the young lady has been made—I confess it—and it lies still in her mother's hands. She is the daughter and heiress, Alicia, of the late Sir Lancelot Eldridge——'

'What does it mean, then, Jack?'

'It means, Alicia, that I have returned to my allegiance, to my first love——'

'Oh!' She received the information doubtfully, because there was a lack of ardour in the bearing of her suitor. His words were ardent, but his manner was cold.

'I have reason to believe that the kindness of Lady Mildred might—I only say might, Alicia, because I do not venture to claim any positive knowledge as to the young lady's feelings—might be equalled by the kindness of her daughter——'

'Oh!'

'I have, however, written to Lady Mildred;

you shall see the letter, here it is.' He drew it forth and gave it to her. 'You see, it is a free withdrawal——'

'Jack!' She read the letter quickly, and kept it. 'Are you quite, quite straight with me?'

'Perfectly, Alicia. I have never been anything but straight with you.'

'And it isn't money?'

'You mean that I have not much left. That is quite true, I have nothing to conceal from you. But it isn't money. There is plenty, at all events, in that young lady's hands, far more than there is in yours. But it isn't money, Alicia, I am not so mercenary as you think, and I have given up this other girl wholly for your sake. Forgive me, Alicia! Perhaps, some day, you will take pride in me——'

She laughed gently. 'Ah, Jack! you always said that. Well, let me see. I know where you were. Down at the sea-side with one of those girls——'

'The daughter and heiress——'

'Trying to get round her. Then you came back to town. I thought you were afraid of

catching the wrong one, which would be catching a crab, wouldn't it?'

'I have always known which is the real daughter——'

'Have you? I thought nobody knew. Well, now, I will post this letter myself, to prevent accidents. Jack,' she said, looking straight in his face, 'there was once a man like you, with no money of his own, you know, who married a woman with a tolerably good fortune. He thought, as soon as he was married, that he could do what he liked, and so he began to carry on shameful, as if his wife hadn't common feelings. She let him have his head for a bit, and then, when he'd quite got accustomed to the best of everything and couldn't live without it, she turned him into the street, where there is no claret and no champagne. So that poor man caught a Tartar, didn't he?'

'What has that to do with me?'

'Oh! nothing, of course; and I'm sure you'll never give me cause to allude again to that unfortunate creature, who now walks the streets between two pretty boards! I don't mind the portraits of the models—your three

beautiful conquests, you know—and I don't care a bit about Miss Eldridge, because I am quite certain she wouldn't have had you. But there is something worse than either. There is a certain little girl at Hoxton, the workgirl, Jack.' He started and turned pale. What did she know? 'You've been seen walking with her; not once, but half a dozen times. Now, you know, I am not going to stand that! It isn't likely.'

'She was going to let me paint her face, Alicia——'

'Well, you'll paint somebody else's face—your own, if you like; it's red enough now. No, Jack, no more visits to Hoxton, if you please. I wonder if it is reckoned good form for a gentleman—your father and mine weren't gentlemen, but they wouldn't have done that—to meet a ragged little creature like that, in her dinner-hour, and turn her silly head with nonsense? I wonder what men are made of? You told her she was pretty, I suppose?'

'I am sure I don't want to meet the girl any more. These girls, Alicia—don't imagine that I was really turning the girl's head with

any nonsense—often require a great deal of persuasion before they will consent to sit——'

'I dare say,' she replied, with an incredulous sniff. 'Well, Jack, I'm a fool to forgive you, and I shan't trust you too much. Most women would give you up altogether after finding out all I've found out. But when we're married—mind—— You may kiss me again, if you like.'

Jack obeyed her, but not as if he liked it much.

'As for playing the distinguished man, I think you will find it a precious deal easire in Russell Square with me than in Park Lane with your Eldridges! We're an easy-going lot, me and my friends, and we will just take you on your own estimate, however big it is; and if you like to talk Art and Æsthetics when my friends come to dinner, why this is just the house to talk it in. Wasn't all the money made out of Art? I don't say we shall understand you, but that doesn't matter a bit, and they'll think all the better of you if they don't, particularly as they all knew your poor father! You'll look well, and you'll talk well, and you'll be very careful, my dear boy, very careful indeed, not to turn up your distinguished nose

at my friends because there may be a letter waiting here and there, or because their money, like mine, was made in the shop. If you do, there will be pepper. As for your father——'

'That is quite enough, Alicia—we understand each other thoroughly. We shall make ourselves perfectly happy, and you shall have your own way in everything.'

'I mean to, Jack. As for getting into society, I am not anxious to know people who despise honest trade. But if you like to bring them here, you can. They won't dare to show their contempt for the shop, I think, in my house. If they do——but never mind, my dear Jack, you are going to lead the most comfortable life in the whole world. And you don't deserve it a bit; and I shall tell all my friends—who wouldn't tell a fib for the man she loves?—that you are really almost as clever and distinguished as you look!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RETURN, O SHULAMITE!

So, at last, dawned the morning of Valentine's last day in Hoxton—the last day comes, if one waits long enough, of everything.

Her last day. She awoke before daybreak, and watched how the dawn—a pretty sight—gradually revealed in all their beauty, the Board School and the back yards and the courts commanded by her window. There were no larks singing in the sky or swallows flying about the eaves to welcome the sun, perhaps because the season was too late for larks and swallows; nor was there any autumnal splendour of wood and coppice for the sun to shine upon and to glorify; but there were cats and there were sparrows—and gradually there arose a murmur of life, and dirty blinds were pulled up or pinned up, and the mortals behind them got themselves dressed in their work-a-

day clothes, and the day's labours began. For most of them such dreary, weary, monotonous and unprofitable labours!

Her last day. She looked round the little cell where she had spent three long summer months, a willing prisoner—and now she loved the place. On her bed lay the sick girl, who had taken so many nights' rest from her. When first she came there was no sick girl to care for, nor had she any single friend—who now had so many—in the whole place. There were her household gods—all the things which Claude had given her for what she thought would be a three months' picnic, but proved to be the prelude to a lifelong work—they were no longer new; the frying-pan, never very strong—man, mere man, cannot know how to choose a frying-pan—was now battered out of shape; it had fried quantities of chops, steaks, eggs, kidneys, and bacon. The sauce-pan and the kettle, both showed—because they had boiled with enthusiasm—the black and respectable garb of labour. The first freshness was gone from the colour of her rugs and curtains. The mignonette in the window-box, which had been all the summer so great a

solace to her, was now reduced to three scentless stalks. The summer was over, and the air, when she opened the window, blew fresh and cold; and as for her face, as she looked in the glass and wondered what Violet would say, it seemed to have grown longer, though that could hardly be, and graver. In the past three months how much had she learned and how much had she seen?

Her last day! She was going home—to the real home; in what Sam called the camp of those who are the natural enemies of the working-classes, where no one has to work, and the days flow on in idlesse all; where there is abundance, where there is music, where there is Art, and where there is the magic of poetry; where the girls are wrapped in soft silks, and kept from hearing how the workwomen cry aloud and cry in vain, and how they suffer in patience, hand in hand, with no one to help them or to care whether they live or die. But their cry, and the memory of their sufferings, would never leave her. She knew that she could no longer remain in that camp: she must come back again! She must return to the world where the women suffer. Everybody who once visits

that world must go back to it. Those who work in it never want to leave it. Only three months ago: why—Claude was then her brother; what was he now? How could they go on working together when he should find out the truth? Three months ago they were both children of an honest workman, dead long since, and now Claude's father was not dead at all, but a shameful, horrible, living creature, who was going to bring misery upon all of them unless she could keep him silent and obscure. That silence, at any cost, she would procure and pay for—Claude must never know or suspect, and Violet must never know or suspect.

She would come back again, not as a visitor, but to live. That was now her firm resolve. She was as bent upon it as a novice is bent on taking the vows. But she would no longer live in her single chamber. That was not necessary. Enough for three months to have been housemaid, cook, parlourmaid, and lady's-maid all in one; enough for honour to have carried water upstairs, swept her own room, cooked her own dinner, boiled the kettle, made the bed, and cleaned the window. In one respect only she

differed from the old woman below her—that she put out her washing. Now the old woman never had any to put out. For the greater part of the time her bed had been occupied by a girl in a consumption, so that she had to sleep as she could, on a chair, or a bed made up of three chairs. One must be a Moravian missionary before one can contemplate without a shudder a continuance of this way of life. She was coming back, but it would be to a home of her own, where she could live somewhat more as she was accustomed to live. Her house should be in Hoxton—she was resolved upon that, but it would not be quite in the midst of those who habitually get drunk on Saturday nights, and commonly use coarse imprecations, and when in liquor knock down and kick their wives. Even the Fellows of Toynbee Hall do not actually live in the very courts and lanes of the Whitechapel Road and Commercial Street. No doubt they will do so when, by their efforts, these courts have become Courts of the Great King; at present they seclude themselves in their College, each man with his own room æsthetically furnished for the pleasure of his soul, and removed

somewhat from noise and stress and struggle of the common life. We may, in fact, give ourselves up, 'like anything,' for our fellow-creatures, who will very likely give up nothing, not even a humble little vice or two, in return; but there are some hours in the day which should be kept apart and consecrated, even by the most thorough Renunciator, for the recreation and refreshment of his soul. All the monks, hermits, and recluses on record made the great mistake that they did not provide such hours of rest. The gain, for example, in the way of spiritual elevation would have been inestimable if the Holy Fakeer, Simon Stylites, had let himself down by a rope ladder, once a day, just to enjoy in the cool of the evening the conversation of the damsels and gossips in the bazaar; and think of the difference it would have made to the saint who used to swing all day with the hook in his back, if some kind friend had taken that hook out of him every day, at the going down of the sun, so that for a couple of hours at least he might have smoked a pipe and had a chat beneath the village banyan. To what pinnacles of spirituality might not the Fakeer Simon and the hooked saint

have risen! But they failed. Simon got no higher, spiritually speaking, than the top of his pillar, and the other holy man never got outside, so to speak, of his dangling hook, because they were always attached to these foolish things. And now their sayings, if they ever said anything, and their discoveries, if they ever made any, in Theology and Morals, are quite lost and forgotten, just for want of that little daily intermission and rest, which would have brightened them up and inspired them with words of wisdom.

These general reflections applied to Valentine mean that too much Hoxton for those who have the best interests of Hoxton at heart is bad for Hoxton.

When Valentine went downstairs, she found her friend the letter-writer starting on his daily round among the German immigrants. There had been recently quite a large importation of Polish Jews who were making a little Yiddish Poland for themselves up a court. I think they had brought with them a great many barrels of native dirt, so as to feel homelike; and were now living on charity, in the begging of which the scribe was making an

unusual harvest. He was doing so well that he had bought a new pair of second-hand boots; like a tax-gatherer, he carried his ink in one waistcoat-pocket and his pen in another, while his writing-paper lay in a shabby old leather case, which perhaps was once brown, but now was black with age. He greeted Valentine with cheerfulness, though the Bishop at the moment was lying grievously ill, and his family were gathered at the Palace, and three physicians were in consultation.

'But suppose the Bishop dies,' said Valentine; 'then your dream will be finished.'

'Yes,' he answered, with his soft and gentle smile. 'Yes, if the Bishop does not recover, my dream will be finished indeed; for I am the Bishop, you know. You are leaving us to-day?'

'To-morrow morning. I have got, where I am going, another mother and another sister. Do you not think it is time I went to see them?'

They were standing in the court, between the little Chapel and the open space on the south side, where two or three houses have been pulled down. The old man pointed with his stick to Melenda's window, which was open,

showing the new clean blind and the new curtains; next, he passed that stick slowly before all the houses comprehensively and severally, meaning to include them all; and then he pointed to the little children swarming about the place like tadpoles in a pond; and, lastly, he indicated the women, bustling about their daily tasks. He did this solemnly and slowly, as one who hath a thing to say and thus delivers his soul.

'Do you know,' he asked, after performing this ceremony, 'do you know what they are saying, all of them, at your departure?'

'What are they saying?'

'They are saying, "Return, O Shulamite!"'

He walked away slowly, with his rounded shoulders, his long grey hair and his ragged coat; an old man who ought to have been taken right away and forbidden to work any more; who should have been provided with all kinds of things that are pleasant to old men —with books and sunshine and warmth and companionship. In a well-ordered State this will be done for all the old men alike, from saint to sinner, from Duke to ditcher. But nothing can ever be done now for this individual

poor old man, and you will presently discover why.

'Return, O Shulamite!' The words lingered in her ears; the sweet old words of love and yearning.

Did they want her to return? Had she done anything to anybody during her three months that they should want her to come back to them, or that they should miss her presence among them?

There is a Sense which lies dormant with most of us. It may always be awakened, and, once roused, it never leaves us. Let us call it, if you please, the Sense of humanity. It is not philanthropy, nor benevolence, nor sentimentality; it is a thing much fuller and wider than any of these. Peter got this Sense when he had the vision of the Great Sheet. It is the Sense of the Universal Brotherhood. Some of the French Republicans were filled with it when they first began to shout their cry of Equality and Fraternity. Some of the Socialists are filled with this sense; it has nothing to do with religion or with creed: the lives of the Saints are full of the stories of men who have had this sense strongly developed; the lives of the

Sinners, which have yet to be written—would that I could attempt that stupendous task!—will also be found quite full of such stories. Saint or Sinner, it matters not; the Sense of Humanity may be found in either. One may be a Peer and have it; one may be a beggar and have it not. Those who have it, and have developed it, are like mathematicians, when they resolve all plane forces to two, and all forces in space to three, for they presently resolve humanity into the simple pair—the man and the woman; or, to be practical, since in the world there are no planes, but everything is of three dimensions, into the man, the woman, and the child. It is a Sense by means of which one is enabled to separate the man from his clothes, whether they are rags or gowns of office, and from his sins, whether they be those which society allows, or those which are not recognised; and—which is a dark saying—it destroys respect and yet builds up reverence. Valentine had discovered this Sense; she had awakened it in Claude; she saw it in Sam, in the Doctor, and in the Assistant Priest.

When the letter-writer had passed out of Ivy Lane Valentine remembered the old woman

who lived below her and got drunk whenever she could. She was not at all a nice old person, but Valentine thought she would see her before she departed—it would be neighbourly. So she knocked at her door and went in. This morning she looked very dreadful, because she had been tipsy the evening before, and had got a bruise round one eye, and the other was red; her lips were tremulous and her cheeks blotched; also she wore no cap, which was an error in Art, because her head was bald in patches. Queen Venus, when she is old and bald, ought at least to wear a cap. And she was muttering over her work, which, as has already been stated, was intimately connected with approaching funerals.

'Well, my dear,' she said, cheerfully, 'and how is the sweet young gentleman? And how long are you going to stay here?'

'I am going away to-morrow. I came to see if I could do anything for you before I go.'

'There, now! I said there'd be a wedding when I saw you in St. Luke's graveyard with him. A sweet young couple indeed. Ah! it does an old woman's heart good to let her eyes fall on such.'

'But I am not going to be married.'

'Well, my dear, it won't matter much how you arrange it. And there'll be another match soon, unless I'm mistaken, with Liz upstairs—there's another pretty one for you—and her young gentleman. Oh! I've seen them together too.'

'Is there anything I can do for you before I go?'

'Well,' said the old woman, 'I dare say he's given you some money. He looks the sort to be free of money.'

'I tell you I'm not going to be married.'

'I didn't say you were, my dearie. But if you've a shilling upon you to spare, I'd thank you for it. Get all you can, my dear, get all you can while your time lasts.'

She looked detestably cunning and inconceivably wicked. Valentine, however, found a coin for her.

'The air's getting fresh now,' the old lady went on, 'and the nights are cold. When it's too cold to sit without a fire and to sleep without blankets, I've got to go back to the 'Ouse. It's warm there, if it's nothing else. You think it's hard, but wait till you're as old as me, my dear, and see if you don't come to it as well.

Make yourself happy while you can. It's no use saving; spend and enjoy all you can get while you are young, my pretty. When you're old you'll have the remembrance of it, and it'll make you feel happy just to think that you didn't let the good times slip past. Don't forget me next year if I'm spared to come out. Oh! it does one good in such a place as this, even to see a pretty girl with a proper frock on. But there, you won't be pretty when you come back here. Lord! what a figure I had once! And I can tell you about the time when I had a house of my own!'

Valentine left her at the commencement of these recollections. Eve, in age and decay, long after she had eaten, not one, but all the forbidden apples within reach, and longed for those out of her reach, may have looked so and talked so. A curious case for the spiritual physician. Next year she will be 'out' again, for these old women are tough and long lived; and perhaps for many years she will continue to be alternately 'in' and 'out,' and to exist as an example and a warning for the young. This dear lady, too, ought to be taken away and carefully cherished, with warmth and good food,

and the semblance of liberty. Not that she would ever repent her of her sins, or wish the memory of the past to be other than it is, or get a gleam of light into her darkened soul about a better life. A better plan, perhaps, would be painless and sudden extinction. But the old lady, who, I suppose, would have to be consulted, for form's sake, is not yet educated to the point of perceiving how much her disappearance would benefit mankind. The subject opens a wide field for speculation, for there are so many among us who might with advantage be painlessly and unexpectedly extinguished.

Valentine proceeded on her way down Ivy Lane calling at the houses where she had friends, that is to say, at nearly every house. The children ran after her as she went, catching at her hands and hanging to her skirts. That means nothing, because children are so foolish as to trust and love everyone who is kind to them. 'Come back soon,' they cried; 'Come back soon.' Then from the children Valentine went to see her friends the workwomen in their rooms. She knew, by this time, dozens of them, which is not difficult in this Thimble-and-Thread-Land, where there are so many thou-

sands always at work. The women paused in their work for a minute to bid her farewell. There was the young tailoress of nineteen with two babies and a husband out of work, and her mother who looked after the babies, while she worked from seven in the morning till ten at night, for eight shillings a week, less the cost of coal and candle, soap and cotton. She was a handsome, capable looking girl, with square chin, fresh lips, and strong eyes. She looked up and laughed a welcome, and when Valentine bade her farewell, she cried, but not for long, although a whole hour's crying would only have cost her a penny and one-fifteenth. 'But you'll come back soon,' she said. Then there was the woman who lived on the ground-floor, working all day long for bare life, with her daughter; there was the old lady with the imbecile husband, who worked for both; there was the girl who ought to have been married some years before, and there was the girl who ought not to have been married for some years to come; they all stopped to bid her farewell and to say 'Come back soon,' and then returned again to their breathless and headstrong flight from the Fury of Famine, who pursues them

continually with a scourge of knotted cord, or a flagellum loaded with lead, such as that with which the Romans corrected disobedient slaves. Then there were the older women with their great families—Nature, very oddly, when the Horn of Plenty is quite empty, always fills it with babies. How bravely they work, these mothers! And how their faces harden, and how early the lines gather round lips and eyes! Surely, as the girls murmur when the drilling begins, surely, 'it is a Shame!'

And from them too, from every room into which Valentine had found her way, from every court there came the cry, 'Come back soon'—'Return, O Shulamite!' Strange how the words lingered in her ear and repeated themselves—words sometimes will just as if they followed one about or were echoed within the recesses of the brain.

At the door of the Boys' Institute, she met the Rev. Mr. Randal Smith. He was looking pale and over-worked, because he had been in London all the summer; and besides, had given away his money, and had none to go on holiday with; and his long coat and broad-brimmed black hat were shabby because he could not

afford new ones, and he looked faded, and dejected, and boyish, and without dignity.

'I know you are going,' he said gloomily. 'The Doctor told me.'

'I am coming back again.'

'It is wonderful that you stayed so long. We shall miss you, though you never come to Church.'

'Not to your Church.'

'Oh! what a power for good you might be if you chose! Why, you might bring all those boys of mine to Church: they would follow you. It's the only thing for them—Church Discipline and Confession. I know you laugh at us; but there is nothing except the confessional for getting a hold over the people and putting the priests in their right place.'

'Well, Mr. Smith, if you will confess to the Doctor, I dare say he will confess to you. Will not that satisfy you? Never mind your confessional, tell me about yourself. You look pale—you want a holiday.'

'I cannot get one, unfortunately.'

As Valentine considered this young man she remembered that it was for some such life as this, without the choral services, that Claude

was giving up his career. What if he should weary of it?

'Tell me,' she said, 'you who work so hard and do so much for the boys—are you contented with your life?'

'I am quite contented with it. I ask for nothing better.'

'That is a brave thing to say. Would you, if you had the chance, exchange it for an easier life and a larger income?'

'Not now,' he replied, sturdily. 'When I grow old and feeble I should like a stronger man to come here.'

'Do you think that everybody engaged in such work as this continues to be as satisfied and contented?'

'I think so. We must not desire anything beyond the work that we are set to do.'

'Do you never wish,' Valentine continued, 'for opportunities of distinction? Are you never ambitious?'

'I have no other ambition,' he replied, with an ecclesiastical tag and a return of the breathless manner, 'than to be a faithful servant.' In fact, he had no desire for distinction at all, probably because in quite early life he understood that he was neither sharp nor clever.

'And do you never,' she asked, 'do you never think of love or marriage?' She was asking all these questions in the interest, so to speak, of Claude, and she suddenly, but too late, remembered what the Doctor had told her. This young man had been thinking about love. 'Forgive me,' she said hurriedly, because he blushed and trembled and looked about for the earth to swallow him; 'forgive me, Mr. Smith, I ought not to have asked you that question.'

'It—it doesn't matter. Thank you,' he said, 'it's of no consequence.'

'I was only wondering,' she explained, 'whether in such work as yours there never comes a sense of weariness, as if it was all no good and one might as well be living like the rest of the world.'

'There is no weariness of the work. Sometimes, perhaps, sometimes one thinks of a life—with—with love it.' His eyes dropped, and he blushed again.

'No weariness in the work. That never palls, does it?'

'Well,' he was really a truthful young man, 'there are the church services. It is no doubt the best discipline possible for a man, and of

course we say matins and evensong for the whole parish, but as nobody ever comes to hear them, one sometimes feels as if there were too many services.'

'So I should think.'

'It is a weakness of the flesh which I hope to overcome in time.'

She touched his hand and left him with a pleasing and rather uncommon mixture in her heart, composed of admiration, respect, and pity in equal parts, and just as one adds to a claret cup a little sprig of borage, or a strawberry, so she added the merest dash of contempt. His life was so hard—he was so contented, so courageous, and so unselfish—he was so patient—he thought so little of himself—he was so free from any ambition except to be, as he said, a faithful servant—he accepted with so much meekness the tiresome and useless things which wasted his time and dragged him from his real work, the daily chanting of services which nobody attended, the weary iteration of litanies in an empty church and the fripperies which this poor ignorant lad took for the true religion of the past, the present, and the future; a religion in which, he thought,

there was to be no singing except of Gregorian chants; and no sunshine except through painted windows; and no attitude for the laity *in sæcula sæculorum*, except of continual genuflexion before a close-shaven man in a cassock and a cope, and a biretta cap, surrounded by boys in white surplices, with pots of incense.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST EVENING.

'You must spend this evening with us, Claude,' said Valentine; 'it is my last evening, and we are going to have tea in Melenda's room. Besides, I want you to say all sorts of kind things to the poor girl.'

'Your last evening! A good deal has happened, Valentine, since you came here first.'

'Yes, a great deal has happened. But, Claude, we must get those lines out of your forehead and the depression out of your eyes.' See how readily men betray their trouble.'

'You will not do that easily, Valentine,' he said, with a forced laugh. 'The fates are too strong even for you.'

She was now quite certain that the trouble of his soul could only be caused by some knowledge of her father's history, but she could not learn how much he knew.

'You do not regret your choice, Claude?'

'I had no choice,' he replied gloomily; 'I thought I had. But I had not. There are some men, Valentine, who are condemned to obscurity from the very beginning; they can only be happy when they are unknown and forgotten.'

Claude was more than usually gloomy because he was suffering from an acute attack of a complaint not described in any book on medicine. Celsus and Galen ignore its symptoms. It has no name, but it is caused by family or paternal shame. His excellent father, who found in the torture of his son a truly delightful amusement, and concluded that the daughter, who lived in Hoxton, was not worth following up so long as she paid her weekly sovereign, now visited his chambers at all hours, having a master-key which he had made for himself. He borrowed Claude's clothes; he drank his wine; he sat there and fiddled all day long; he smoked tobacco there; he opened all the desks and drawers and read all the private papers—even those verses with which every young man loves to comfort his soul, and the letters from his friends; he came in the morning

and stayed all day; he came in the evening and stayed all night. Claude might give up his chambers, but the man would follow him, and what would be the end? He demanded money perpetually, and always got some, if not all that he asked, by the exercise of a very simple threat. If he did not get it he would go to his daughters. He had even begun to take away things which were portable and might be pawned, such as the silver mugs, those volumes which were expensively bound, and the pictures; honestly, however, giving his son the pawn tickets.

Claude made no objection at all. Let the man go on; let him strip the place; let him do what he pleased, so that he remained unknown to the rest of his family.

Claude forced himself, however, to assume a pretence of cheerfulness, and stayed with Valentine. They all had tea together in Melenda's room. It was a quiet party; Melenda, to begin with, was shy, and as yet a little awkward in the performance of her new character as Melenda the Amiable. Yet she looked the part. The new dressing of her hair changed her face, her eyes were no longer

fierce; two days only of good food had taken the hungry look out of her face; she was in repose, and she was afraid of her brother, who, however, said nothing about the great and startling transformation—not even to offer a word of congratulation, being quite absorbed in thought about other things. As for Lizzie, she was still under the influence of Repentance, and not without fear that her lover might himself come to the house, and insist on her promises being kept. Moreover, the Shadow of Death rested upon the place, and in the next room lay one who patiently awaited the summons.

The autumn day was already closed, for in the middle of October the sun sets at five; the curtains were drawn, the lamp was lit, the fire burning, and Melenda in the newly-born joy of her own humiliation, thought the room looked almost as lovely as Valentine's; and after tea they sat round the fire, Valentine holding Melenda's hand in her own.

About seven o'clock they heard steps upon the stairs, and there appeared at the door no other than Joe himself, accompanied by his daughter Rhoda, and Sam.

'Mother told us,' he said, 'that you were going away to-morrow. Why, what in the name o' wonder has come over the place?' For Melenda's room, he perceived, was transformed into a lady's bower.

'It is only that Melenda and I are friends at last,' Valentine explained. 'Come in, Rhoda dear: come in, Sam.'

'And so I thought I'd come. Well, I shouldn't ha' known the place, Melenda, I shouldn't really—nor you neither, I shouldn't —and I brought Rhoder along with me, and we went out of our way to fetch Sam. Look at your Aunt Melenda, my gal; now she's something like. I never knew you were so well worth lookin' at, Melenda.' Melenda blushed and laughed.

'Sit down, Joe,' said Valentine. 'Rhoda, you take my chair. Sam, you must sit on the bed, unless you like to stand.'

So, for the first time since the departure of Polly into the aristocratic world, the whole of this remarkable family, counting Valentine as Polly, were gathered together. The vicissitudes of families have furnished many subjects for the moralist and the storyteller, as well as for

the genealogist. In every house there are those who have climbed or are climbing, and those who have gone under and are still going lower. Down goes Jack, and with him his whole detachment. Up goes Dick, and with him his sons and his daughters and his grandchildren. But it is rare to find so much variety in one group and one generation. It is not usual, for instance, for a Fellow of Trinity to have one sister a needle-woman, and another a young lady; nor is it a general thing for a plumber's man to have one brother a Board School Master, and one a Cambridge Scholar. It is also unusual, Claude reflected, for any family to have a father with so remarkable a history as their own.

'You're going away,' Joe repeated slowly, looking still at Melenda, whose changed appearance fascinated him. 'You're going away.' It is the place of the elder brother to give utterance for the family on all occasions of importance, and on every *conseil de famille.* Joe accepted his responsibility, and was always ready to perform his duties as Head of the Family, though Claude might be a gentleman, and Sam had achieved greatness. 'You're

going away to-morrow; well, you've done a deal o' good to us since you came. Mother, she'll miss you more than a bit. We left her cryin', didn't we, Rhoder? And so will the girls here—they'll miss you terrible, won't you, Melenda? Lord! it's wonderful. You look just exactly like a girl out of a shop, quiet and respectable, instead of going about in rags, and flying in one's face like a wild cat. And you'll miss her too, Liz; and as for that poor girl in the next room—your own room too—what in the world will she do without you?'

'But I am not going away for long. I am coming back. I am going to live in Hoxton; so is Claude.'

Sam grunted.

'There was two of you came first,' Joe went on slowly. 'You said then as you didn't know which of the two was Polly. As for the other one, she hasn't come again, has she? Very well; first, we don't need to say much about you before your face, do we? No. When you go away, whether it's for short or for long, there's some you've left behind who'll remember you, ain't there, Melenda?'

'She knows there is,' said Melenda.

'Well, and about the other one now. If it should happen,'—he said this very slowly, so that there might be no possibility of any mistake—'I wish to say—for all of us—that if it should happen to come to pass that the other one was to turn out to be Polly after all, and not you at all; and that you should turn out to be her ladyship's daughter, Miss Beatrice—which it may be for aught I know—why, I want to give you a message for the other one.'

'Yes, Joe, what is the message?'

'It is a message from all of us; from Melenda, and Sam, and Claude, as well as from me. It's to tell her not to be ashamed of her family, because her father was a man with such a character for Truth and Honesty as very few men can boast, and a clever workman as well——' Oh, Joe!—Claude and Valentine glanced involuntarily at each other. 'That's what I've always told Claude. Don't let her be ashamed of her father; and as for us, why we don't expect her to come and live with us as you've done; we don't ask her, nor we don't expect her. We know that she's a young lady accustomed to live among young ladies, and we're only plain working people. It's enough

that you've come. We haven't harmed you, have we? You've heard a bit of rough talk now and then; perhaps you've seen a bit o' rough ways, and found out a deal of things you never suspected before, I dare say; but our people haven't harmed you—our people never will harm any respectable girl. If she'd wanted us, she'd have come to us with you. So you tell her that she's a sweet young lady to look at, and we like to think of her pretty face, but we shan't take it amiss that she don't come to us, because she is not one of us. Don't forget to tell her that—not one of us has got anything to ask of her or to take of her.' Sam snorted, and Melenda tossed her head. She had surrendered to one and not to both. 'She needn't be a bit afraid that any of her relations will ever seek her out, or intrude upon her, except Claude, and he's a gentleman. I don't see that she's any call to be ashamed of us as honest and respectable people, ain't we, Melenda? and one of us has worked himself up noble, hasn't he, Sam? As for her father, you tell her again that he was one in a thousand—ah!—as one may say, one of a thousand for honesty.'

With the repetition of this Colossal false-

hood, Joe paused. Then he added a few words of personal application, just as a clergyman winds up his discourse.

'As for you,' he said, 'whether you are Polly, or whether you are not, you're a lady, and such we are glad to see. You can't come too often nor stay too long. You don't want to poke your nose into the working man's affairs, as some ladies do; you don't think your duty lays in giving advice gratis; you don't want to manage folk as if they were Sunday School children; you don't come the Temperance Gospel nor the Blood and Fire Hallelujah over us; you don't look at us as if we were specimens in a museum; you don't sniff and make believe as if you were sorry for us all when there's a little mess about the place; when a chap's in trouble or down in his luck, you don't wait for three weeks while the case is gone into; you don't talk about us as if we working people were the Poor, and everybody else was the Rich. Sam does that when he gets into a rage, but it don't amount to more than slashing into the System. Sam thinks he can make us all rich and happy with a new System. Lord! there ain't a great deal

of difference between us after all; it's mostly a matter of clothes. Look at Melenda, now you've smartened her up. She ain't so pretty as you, but now she's dressed and quiet, she looks as nice mannered, almost.'

'Thank you, Joe,' said Valentine. 'If it should be as you think, and Violet should prefer her present life, which is possible, I will tell her what you say. If it should not be so, why, all the more reason for my coming back to live among my own people, and to be proud of my brothers. Oh! Joe, I do think you are the best fellow in the world.' For that brave sticking out for his worthless father, so that the brothers and sisters might never be ashamed, and never even suspect the truth, went straight to her heart.

'And now we'll go,' said Joe. 'Come, Rhoder. Good-bye, Miss Eldridge.' He took her hand respectfully, not fraternally, and she clearly perceived that he knew her secret.

Then Melenda and Lizzie went to look after Lotty, and the three who remained began to talk.

'And what are you going to do when you come back?' asked Sam. 'You can't do any

general good, though you may do something for these three girls. Nothing can be done of any real use until the System is changed, and we've begun by putting the Land on a proper footing. That's at the bottom of all.'

'You shall settle that, Sam,' said Valentine. 'Meantime we shall take the world as it is, and go on tinkering in our small way, until your revolution sets everything right for ever after.'

'What's the use of arguing with a woman?' Sam asked, turning to Claude. 'Here we are, working up for the grandest change the world has ever seen—the change that is going to give the people their own back again—and she keeps on at us because we don't stop to make a fuss about the workwomen.'

'We cannot expect you, with such a magnificent scheme in your head, to think about your sisters, Sam, can we?'

'It will all come in time. I am thinking about them, I tell you. When we've abolished rent and competition, and interest, and capital: when we've nationalised the land, and prevented anybody from getting rich, and made everybody work, I suppose women's wages will be as good as men's; that is, they will all be alike,

and they'll mean a good living to everybody—won't that satisfy you?'

'Perhaps, when it comes. But, Sam, how long is it in coming? And suppose we don't like it when it does come? Suppose you only make it more possible for selfish men to use the labour of others, and for strong men to trample on the weak?'

'You are talking nonsense. You don't know the very first beginnings of our revolution.'

'Claude, have you nothing to say?'

Claude hesitated. Things had grown terribly real with him of late, and he spoke slowly and with sadness. 'I do not suppose,' he said, 'that some men are born with saddles fitted to their backs, and others with spurs on their heels. And I think that Maurice was right when he taught that the reign of Universal Competition is not exactly and altogether the Kingdom of Heaven. And I do not believe that the Lord is always on the side of the man who is making money.'

'Very good,' said Sam. 'Why, this is just as I would begin myself.'

'But I am certain there is no System, or

Institution, or code of laws, whatever, which can be imposed upon a people, unless they are ready for it, and desire it for themselves. You will never live to see your dream realised, Sam, because it will be always impossible to make the men of ability, who are the only men to be considered, desire a system in which they themselves shall not be able to do good to themselves first. If it were established to morrow, it would fall to pieces the next day, for want of incessant and universal watchfulness. I think we had better take the world as it is, and use the materials lying ready to our hands.'

'Oh! the world as it is,' Sam repeated, 'with the Lords and the Church, and the parsons, and the landlords, and the manufacturers, and the capitalists!'

'With all of them—just as it is—let us take it as it is. Meanwhile there is a Revolution going on of which you know nothing. It is a movement which will be perhaps one of the greatest things that the world has ever seen.' He did not mean the Earthly Tract Society. 'Men and women who have learned all that science and art and history and philosophy can teach them, are returning to the soil and to the

gutter from which their fathers sprang. They come back laden with treasures, which they long to lavish among the people. This is to practise the Christianity which you advanced Thinkers despise. Consider another thing, Sam. It is not only that these missionaries will live among the people and teach them all kinds of things, but they will bring the fierce light of publicity to bear upon their ways and their wants. Do you think that any employer in the world would dare to pay his working women as Melenda has been paid, and to treat them with the cruelty of drilling as she has been treated, if he knew that his name and his rate of pay and his treatment of woman would the very next day be paraded in the public press? The power of publicity has only just commenced. The Journalists as yet only half understand their own power. Why, these men and women are going about actually setting up electric lamps in dark places. Let us try to bring this light into all the workshops, so that no kind of grinding and tyranny shall be overlooked. You know what the Russian student said at the grave of his dead comrade, while the police stood by ready to arrest him for a

word; "My brothers," he said, stretching out his arms, "Light! We want more light." With light, everything may come; even some of the universal unselfishness, Sam, which your generous heart thinks possible. At least, the first steps will be taken when the people begin by themselves to resolve that justice and equity shall be meted out to all, even to the London working girl. And as for systems, the force of opinion is stronger than any system. Opinion is the will of the people; let us get opinion on the side of the girls. And then—Light—more Light.'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BISHOP'S DEATHBED.

It was about nine o'clock when Sam left them. He was angry, because he could not convince them, and because his brother was so very near the gate of truth, and so very perverse in his refusal to step in. And yet, said Sam to himself, logic, justice, equity, reason, natural religion, the laws of the Universe—everything cries aloud that there is no Gospel but Socialism. All men are born equal—every man with two legs and ten fingers, and no possessions at all, not a scrap of purple velvet, and not a shovelful of land; no spurs on his heels, and no saddle on his back; no crown on his head, and no chains on his wrists; for everyone the same inheritance, namely, the whole of the round world and all that therein is, that is, as much of it as, divided among the x inhabitants, in equal portions, constitutes his share. Every

man must work every day for the general good, he must eat at a common table—why should one man have cutlets à la Soubise, and another, cold pig? He must share in all the luxuries that are attainable by every one: if there be other luxuries which are not enough to go round, they may be divided among the sick and the aged; why should one man drink champagne and another vin bleu? This is Sam's position, and, really, it is impossible to dislodge him from it. He is impregnable, because he is perfectly right. Against him, however, is a force with which he and his friends have never reckoned; it is sometimes called Human Nature. It is, in fact, the simple, unarmed, naked, natural Man, who, alone, is a match for a host, armed with all the weapons of logic, and reason, and right, because of his selfishness, which is a whole armour in itself. He wants all he can grab for himself, and he will go on grabbing all he can. He derides equality; he holds that the spoils are for the strongest; and on this principle he is resolved to live, and so will continue to live until the Kingdom of Heaven comes to change all, and make his position disagreeable. Such being

the habit, custom, resolution, and attitude of the Natural Man, the Socialist may rage furiously, but he will rage in vain.

'I must go, too,' said Claude, taking his hat; 'I am glad they came to-night. Alas! the summer is over, to-morrow morning you will be gone. Good-night, Valentine, and farewell.'

'Why a solemn farewell, Claude?'

'Because the past can never be repeated ——'

'Nothing is ever repeated; but things can be continued. If you are going to walk, let me walk a part of the way with you. Oh! I am not afraid of returning alone, no one ever molests me. I am just a shop-girl going home, you know, after business.'

They went out together. The streets were crowded, because it was fine, and a Saturday night. Even Pitfield Street and East Road, which are considered quiet thoroughfares, were filled with costers' carts, and with folk who came out to buy. The City Road was noisy with multitudinous footsteps, and a good half of Old Street was blocked with the overflow of White Cross Street, where there is held every

day and every evening, the noblest costers' market in the whole of London, not even excepting that of the Whitechapel Road. The space is more limited; but then, the very narrowness sets off the variety and cheapness of the goods displayed. Many costers' markets there be in this great town: one would not willingly do injustice to Clare Market, to the New Cut, to the High Street, Marylebone, or to Leather Lane; but that of White Cross Street outshines them all.

'These faces haunt me,' said Valentine, as they moved slowly through the crowd. 'I shall carry home with me a ghostly crowd of faces. How many thousands of faces have I seen here and none of them alike? The noise is nothing; one does not remember noise, but the faces—the faces remain; they are always with me.'

'If the faces were all boiled down into one by repeated photographs, what sort of a face would it be?'

'Not into one face, Claude; there must be two faces; those of the working man and the working woman. I think the man's face would show a certain sluggishness and a good deal of

self-indulgence, and in his eyes one would discern a sense of humour; the woman's face would show patience and suffering, and her eyes would be sharp with indignation; they would have no humour in them. Whatever they might turn out they would not be bad faces.'

The English face, compounded of many races, is seldom, in fact, a bad face; it is good-tempered to begin with; it is independent and self-reliant; there is a love of justice in it; there is strength in it; there is capability in it; there is the possibility of wrath in it; such wrath as makes the Englishman, when his blood is roused, the most dangerous animal in the world—witness the savagery of our soldiers in India not quite thirty years ago; yet the devil faces which one sees in Paris, when the people are out in the streets, are never found in White Cross Market. To watch the English face is to learn trust in the English people.

'You will cease to think of your troubles, Claude,' said Valentine; 'you will think of these men and women instead, won't you? It will be best for you; and I am sure it is best to let the dead bury the dead.'

'I wish to heaven I could. But suppose the dead refuse to be buried.'

She said no more. Perhaps he had found out even more than she had feared. Presently they reached the end of Old Street where it runs like a broad river into Goswell Road and Aldersgate Street, and here Valentine stopped.

'Good-bye, Claude,' she said; 'come to see us at home to-morrow evening. I am going home again. Oh! I have had the strangest, the most beautiful summer that ever any girl had, and all by your help, Claude. How can I ever thank you enough? I wonder if you can understand at all what it has been to me—this revelation of Men and Women, whom we dare to call common men and women. I am like Peter after the Vision and the Message, which only came to him three times. But my Vision and my Message, Claude, have been repeated to me daily for ninety days.'

'And as for me, Valentine,' he replied, huskily, 'I can never tell you; I can never even try to tell you what the summer has been to me.'

He pressed her hand and she left him. She was not, you see, his sister; that he had known

all along, and now she would find out the truth, and it was impossible that they should continue together in the old relations. What more? He loved her. Who could help loving her, who was so winsome, so loyal, and so brave? He had always loved her, ever since the day when he found out that she was not his sister, and for her sake he had given up all his ambitions, yea, even the ambition of the Chancellor's woolsack; and there were moments when it seemed possible, but the appearance of his father made that and everything else impossible; and now, he should never be able to tell her, even in the after years, what she had become to him. How could such a man as himself, with such a Family Record, dare to connect himself, even in thought, with such a girl?

He stood at the corner of the street watching her light figure speeding quickly along the pavement. Now, either because his heart was so full of love that he could not bear to let the girl go out of his sight, or because a Divine admonition came to him—they do come sometimes and interfere strangely with the fortunes of men, though generally we disregard them, so that

rogues triumph—Valentine had not got thirty steps before he felt constrained to turn and follow after her. He did so, keeping a few yards behind her, and not losing sight of her for a moment.

The light figure moved swiftly among the people who crowded the pavement, through the men who lounged hands in pocket, and the women who pushed basket in hand. They made way for her to pass, no one offering her the least familiarity. Some of them, perhaps, knew her by this time. She passed through the crowd and crossed the street to the north side where there were fewer people. Presently she stopped, and Claude watched her while she talked to a girl. I know not what she said, or whether she gave the girl anything, but when Valentine left her that girl went away quickly, and in exactly the opposite direction, which seemed as if she had changed her mind about something. In the City Road she stopped again, to talk with another woman who had a baby in her arms. She did give that woman something, and she, too, turned and walked away in another direction, which leads one to believe that she proposed to go home and put

the baby to bed. One of these days we shall have a Female Police in addition to the present highly efficient masculine force. They will be called probably the Female Persuasives, rather than the Female Force; they will carry no clubs or revolvers, and they will be horribly dreaded by all kinds of sinners. When you have crossed the City Road and engaged, so to speak, with Brunswick Place, you are already within the limits of Hoxton itself, and if you are so happy as to live in that City of Industry, you are among friends, and almost at home; therefore you will naturally, as Valentine did, begin, at this point, to walk more slowly.

Claude still followed her, as far as the western entrance of Ivy Lane in St. John's Road. There he would have left her and gone his way, but for a thing which awakened his suspicions. St. John's Road is not better lighted than any other of the less important London streets, where they blindly follow the custom of our ancestors, and plant the gas lamps—each with a glass top artfully designed to let all the light mount upwards to the sky and so be lost—at the same intervals as were thought good in the old days of oil lamps. The

conservatism of the official mind is a truly wonderful subject for contemplation. The street was, however, well enough lighted for Claude to see a figure waiting about on the pavement, opposite to Ivy Lane. There were plenty of people walking, but this man was evidently waiting, and when Valentine turned into Ivy Lane, this man crossed the road and followed her.

He followed her at a distance of three or four yards—Claude wondered what it might mean. Then he passed under the gas lamp at the entrance of the street, and Claude saw his face. Heavens! It was the face of his father! What could he want with Valentine, except to break his promise, and molest and frighten her? It was his father, and by a lurch of the shoulders which betrayed him, his father, it was certain, had been drinking.

Claude quickened his step, his first impulse being to stop the man; but he checked himself, because to do so would certainly cause a row in the street. He would wait till Valentine was in her own room. He kept close behind, therefore, ready to interfere for her protection.

The street was pretty full of women,

talking, though it was past ten o'clock and the evening was chilly: there were also a good lot of children, shouting and playing. Valentine passed through them, with a word of greeting and a fair good night for each. The crowd parted right and left and made a lane for her, because they knew her; they parted again for Mr. Carey, because the crowd always does make a respectful lane for a man who has been drinking. But for Claude they did not make way, and he had to force his way through, and the children got about his feet, so that the chase drew ahead of him, and he was unable to prevent what most he dreaded.

On the ground floor Valentine found Mr. Lane's door wide open, and his candle burning. She looked in and nodded pleasantly.

'You are feeling well to-night?' she asked.

'Never better, never better,' he replied stoutly. 'Business has been good this week. I think they are beginning to find me out at last. It is strange, too, because I am very near the end of my dream.'

'I hope not. Can't your dream last a little longer?'

'I've got no control over it. You don't

expect me to alter the decrees of Fate. The good Bishop is on his deathbed—I am certain he can never recover. The children are with him. The prayers of all the churches in the Diocese have been offered for him. Many there are who live on, long after sixty-seven: mostly they are men who have only cumbered the ground, whose lives should be an eternal shame to them—men like me—unprofitable dogs. Men like the Bishop are generally called away early, before the allotted span. Well, he will go to his own place. But as for me, what shall I do when he is dead and buried?'

'Indeed, Mr. Lane, I do not know. You will have to find some other amusement for your evenings.'

'Amusement? For me?' He shook his head; and she left him,

Then the old woman who lived at the back came out of her den.

'There's been a gentleman asking for you, my dear,' she said—'not a young gentleman: oh, no!—an elderly gentleman—quite the gentleman—with a pipe in his mouth, and a little in liquor: and most pleasant in his manners, and liberal and generous.'

'A gentleman for me?'

'Yes, my dear, and very anxious he was to know your ways, and asked a many questions!' (she did not add that he had begun by giving her a florin) 'about what you do with yourself, and who gives you your money. But I was very careful—oh! I am very careful indeed, my dear—I didn't let out nothing about the young gentleman. For, thinks I, very likely he may be one of the jealous sort!'

'Oh!' said Valentine impatiently, 'what have I to do with any elderly gentleman?'

'I do hope there's not going to be any trouble about the young gentleman. P'r'aps it wasn't jealousy, and to be sure, I have known, more than once, the lawyers to step in at the last moment and stop it, when the banns was on the point of being put up, so to speak, and the wedding ring bought. Mind, my dear, don't you give up the letters—don't give up a single line of writing—make 'em pay for the letters, if it's five hundred pound—— Here he is again—don't forget about the letters. He do look like a lawyer a bit, come to look at him, don't he?'

It so happened that Mr. Carey, at the very

beginning of this evening, and when he had not yet taken more than two or three glasses, had begun to consider the problem of his daughter, and why she lived in Ivy Lane, and where she got her money from, and by what steps she had come to look like a lady, and what a beautiful thing it would be for himself if he could by any means entrap her, and make her his confederate and partner. Such things have been done; but first it is necessary to know a little of a girl's history. He drank another glass or two, then he resolved that he would himself pay a visit to Ivy Lane and find out what he could. It was a beginning, and he would trust no one but himself. So he came and began, Valentine being out, by pumping the old lady, who willingly told all she knew, which was little to the point. Then he waited for her return.

'Well, my dear,' he began, cheerfully, 'well, Marla, my gal, I've found you out at last—eh? You didn't expect me, did you? Well, this is an agreeable surprise for you, because, my dear, I'll take the liberty, being your father and all, of asking what it means, and how you make your money? It's my duty to see that

my children are living honest, and my pleasure to advise them in their courses.'

'Go away!' said Valentine.

The old woman stopped at the foot of the stairs to watch. Was he a lawyer? Was it a jealous one?

'Go away!' Valentine repeated. The man laughed. The drink had given him courage. Otherwise he would have obeyed.

In the front room the dreamer started and looked round: he had heard a voice he knew.

'Come,' Mr. Carey whispered—'let us talk it over friendly. Give me a kiss, my dear.'

He laid his hand upon her shoulder. Valentine shrank from him with a cry. Melenda heard her—flew from her room, and sprang from the top to the bottom of the stairs with one bound, and stood before her.

'Now, then, who are you?' she cried. 'Don't you be afraid, Valentine. It's only some man who's been drinking, and come to the wrong house! I ain't afraid of any man, drunk or sober—don't you mind. Your very last night, too!'

'Now, don't you put your oar in, young

woman. You'd best stand out of the way, you had!'

'Go out of this,' said Melenda firmly, 'or I'll show you the way.'

'Well,' he went on—'if this don't beat all!' He steadied himself, because the drink made him just a little heavy in the head, and just a little uncertain in his speech: 'They ought to be proud of me—everybody else would be proud of such a man—you'd be proud, you would, my dear—you look like somebody I knew once—you do indeed—it's a most remarkable likeness! There isn't such another man as me in all London. Why, you wouldn't believe it, from the conduct of that skittish little devil there, that I'm James Carey—the great James Carey. Everybody has heard of James Carey! They used to call me the King of the Burglars. I'm King James the First—his Gracious Majesty King Carey. His Royal Highness and Right Reverend King Carey!'

'Go away!' said Melenda, 'or I'll tear you in pieces!'

She hadn't torn anybody to pieces for some time; she had not even enjoyed the luxury of

a Rage Royal, since the last day of the drilling. Now she looked fierce enough for anything. But then a hand was laid upon the man's shoulder—

'Come away,' said Claude—'come away without a word!'

'It's the boy,' said the man, with such a gush of horrid blasphemy only possible after a wretched man has swallowed compulsory doses of Scripture for twenty years. 'It's the adjective boy! What's he doing here? Oh! you think you'll get rid of me, do you? The allowances are to stop, are they?' He addressed Claude, because between him and Valentine, there stood a tigress with flashing eyes and thirsty talons. 'You'll stop yours, will you? Well, we'll see to that, my young swell, and whether you'll rather pay down, or let me own up—pay down, my boy, or let me own up.' He had not drunk so much but that he was perfectly coherent in his speech, but the drink made him foolhardy.

'Go!' said Claude.

'I shall not go.' He raised his voice and added a volley, copious and eloquent, of those flowers of language which are so abundant in

Ivy Lane as to pass for weeds. 'I shall stay,' he concluded, 'all night if I like.'

By this time a little crowd was gathered round the door, expectant of a row.

Then there happened a strange and wonderful thing. The door of the ground floor front opened, and there came forth, slowly and unsteadily, the old man whom they all knew, the harmless old man who had lived among them so many years, and had held speech with none. He carried in his one hand a lighted candle. The other hand, raised to his shoulder, trembled and clutched and closed. His face was perfectly white, as white as the face of a dead man. His long limbs trembled with extreme weakness; his head was bent forward eagerly; his eyes were glaring. It was actually the face of a dead man with living eyes, which gleamed with light supernatural.

'Oh!' he said, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, 'at last I have found mine enemy. I was dying—but I heard his voice. The Bishop'—he turned to Valentine—'the Bishop is dying. And I was dying. But I knew I was not to die till I had seen him once again.' He looked round him as one might look who was taking a

last farewell of earth, and he gave his candle to Valentine as one about to die upon the scaffold hands the last thing he values to the last friend beside him.

'No man,' he said, solemnly looking about him, 'hath power in the day of death; neither shall wickedness deliver them who are given to it.' Then a very wonderful change passed suddenly over his face. It became the face of a young man: the change which sometimes falls upon the face of one who is nearly dead fell upon this man's face before his death. Valentine saw it and knew that she was looking upon the man as he had been, save for his white hair, thirty-five years before, while he was yet in honour and respect. Mr. Carey saw it too—and staggered as if struck suddenly.

'You?' he said, 'you? I thought you must be dead long ago.' He became instantly sober, as half-drunken men sometimes do. Then as the long lean figure turned towards him with outstretched arms, he quickly stepped out of the house and fled, running through the people. After him, with long swift strides, followed Vengeance, long deferred. It seemed as if no one noticed them, for no one ran after

them, and no one cried after them. They passed through the crowd unheeded, and as if unseen. When Claude thought of this afterwards it seemed to him a thing beyond and above the natural. Though the streets were full of people, this strange flight, this strange pursuit, attracted no attention at all, no more than if they were invisible. But he who fled was filled with a wild and dreadful terror, that which falls upon the heart when some long-forgotten crime springs into light, and escape is impossible, and the time of forgiveness is past. And he who followed after was filled with such gladness of rage and satiated revenge as filled the heart of Fredegonde, when, after many years, she saw Brunehaut about to be dragged at the heels of the wild horse. The fugitive ran in vain, for at his heels, though he knew it not, there followed Death, before whom all fly in vain. He was in the shape of an old man, striding with long steps, bareheaded, his grey hairs flying behind him, in rags, with panting breath, white face, and outstretched arms.

There is a place beyond St. John's Road where a bridge crosses the canal: and beyond the bridge there is a way down to the bank.

It is a dark and narrow way. The man ran down here—thinking that he might so escape. But he did not. As he reached the tow-path, the avenging hand was laid upon his shoulder. He turned and faced his enemy. Of what should he be afraid? A poor, old, trembling man who had been starving during all the years which he himself had spent in prison, well cared for and well fed. He looked so decrepit that James Carey laughed aloud and forgot his terror. He had been afraid because he had been drinking. That was all. Afraid of a silly old fool too weak to harm a girl.

'Man!' cried Mr. Lane, seizing his enemy with both hands and shaking him by the coat collar, 'Man! give me back my ruined life.'

James Carey would have laughed again, but that his enemy's face became distorted as by sharp and sudden pain—for once more, for the last time, came that clutching and tearing at the heart—and that his enemy's legs trembled and his body swayed to and fro, and they were on the water's edge, and the decrepit hands, strange to say, held him like a vice. Then there was a staggering and a struggle on the gravel; and a cry of agony and terror, and a

splash in the water . . . and . . . and . . . why, Mr. Lane had got back his life, and, with it, had already learned, one hopes, why such misery and such weakness as his had been permitted even for such an infinitesimal period of time as thirty-five years. When the victim recovered his life, what did his tempter and oppressor recover?

'Who was it?' asked Melenda, when they were gone.

'A drunken man,' said Valentine.

'But he seemed to know you. And Claude knew him. And what had he done to Lizzie's father?'

'I do not know,' said Claude; 'but I know this of him, that he is a bad man. Do not ask any more, Melenda.'

'Well,' said Melenda, 'he's gone at any rate. Come upstairs, Valentine.'

She left them and went back to Lotty. The old woman, feeling the florin burn in her pocket, stole out gently, and made for the public-house opposite by a circuitous route, namely, half down Ivy Lane and back again, so that she should not seem like going out

expressly for a drop of gin. She would only have two twopenny goes and drink up the rest on the morrow—Sunday. And on Monday she would go 'in' again for the winter. Oh! this florin was a blessed windfall indeed, because now she would be able to go back to the House with some of the resignation which accompanies recent gin. The crowd at the door had dispersed, disappointed; there are always more disappointments than real rows; things seldom come off in all their possible fulness.

'The man is gone, Valentine,' said Claude. 'Do you know who he is?'

'Yes, I know him. Something terrible will happen. The other man—Lizzie's father—will do him a mischief; they are old enemies. Oh, it is more wickedness.'

'If there is to be more trouble,' said Claude, 'somebody must be here to meet it for you. Go upstairs, now, Valentine. Good night.'

Valentine obeyed. She did not ask Claude how he came to be there; it was natural that if she was in any danger he should be there to protect her. Nor did she ask Claude how he came to know the man.

Meanwhile, Claude shut the street door, and

sat down on the stairs and waited. They were very uncomfortable stairs to sit upon, being steep and with narrow steps. The candle left in the room beside him went on burning until midnight, when it went out suddenly after just one flicker in the socket. Then the stairs were in perfect darkness, but the front room was lighted by the gas lamp in the street. Outside, the talk of the people grew languid, and finally ceased altogether, and the shuffling of their feet was heard no more; the children left off shouting and crying and went away to bed; the public-house shut up, and the men in the bar dispersed noisily; there was an occasional step of a belated resident, and then nothing but an echo of steps from Hoxton Street, or the distant shouting of some drunken man.

Claude sat on his uncomfortable perch for two or three hours, and then he remembered that there was a chair in the next room. He changed his position, but he did not allow himself to sleep. Strange! that the old man did not return. Had something happened? His mind was agitated and full of foreboding.

In the middle of October the nights are long; the sun does not rise until after six.

Claude waited and watched through the whole of that long night, for seven long hours. Neither of the two men came back. As for one, he was probably in the Temple asleep on Claude's bed, or drinking and smoking and fiddling through the night. But the other—Lizzie's father—where was he?'

And what would come of it all? What would be the end? As for Valentine, in a few hours she would be safe; in two days more she would know that she was not this man's daughter at all. She knew who he was; she said so. How did she know it? How much did she know? There was plenty to occupy his thoughts all through the night.

The morning broke at last—Sunday morning. At the first streak of daybreak Claude went out into the court, as if expecting to find there some traces of the missing pair. The air was keen and clear; Ivy Lane, as the light grew stronger, looked inconceivably disreputable, shabby and dirty, with the wreckage and rubbish of a week lying about, the cabbage stalks, bruised plums, rotten apples and pears, the shreds of paper and potsherds. Well, Valentine was going away; she was no longer

to be considered; he was free, so far as she was concerned. He would go to Joe and tell him all; between the two their mother would be protected; he would give nothing more to his father, and as for his real name and the family history, let them both be proclaimed upon the housetops, with all the infamy and the shame of it, if needs must.

'Thank God,' he murmured—'Valentine is not his daughter!'

A little before eight, there was already some stir among the younger and hungrier residents; the elders lie in bed as long as they can on Sunday mornings, and when the bell of St. Agatha's was calling upon a deaf and stiff-necked people to get up and come to early celebration, and the assistant priest was hastily robing himself for that lonely Function, and the shops in Hoxton were getting swept out and garnished for the Sunday morning market, Valentine came downstairs.

'You here already, Claude?' she asked, surprised.

'Why, Valentine, you did not suppose I should go away and leave you unprotected, would you?'

'You have actually been here all night? You have been watching for me? Oh, Claude! it is too much!'

'Nothing is too much for you, Valentine. Don't think of me, but tell me—what do you know of this man? Why does he come here? Why did he follow you?'

'What do you know, Claude?'

'I know all that there is to know; the whole shameful business.'

'And I, too, know all that there is to know. Do not pain yourself to speak about it. I have known the whole story for a month—Joe and the mother both think he is dead.'

'But how did you come to know him?'

Valentine told her tale, briefly; and passing over one or two passages, especially that in which she was constrained to box the man's ears.

'I bought his silence,' she concluded—'I sent him money every week. But I knew that some time or other it would be found out. Claude, be brave—let us take Joe into our confidence and devise something that will keep him from the others.'

'I bought him, too,' said Claude—'but I

will give him no more money. Thank heaven, you are out of his reach, and so is Violet; she must never know. As for the others——'

'Let us persuade him to go away, Claude. He may be bribed.'

'He will never go away as long as there is a house left in England that he has not robbed.'

There are so many houses in London alone, that the prospect opened up was more stupendous than the mind of man can well take in. And to think, besides, that new houses are always being built.

'At least, Valentine,' Claude went on, 'you are going home this very day. Go at once—if you go now you will find them at breakfast—if you stay here, there may be, I know not, some terrible tragedy. I feel as if anything may happen! Why has not that old man been home all night? And they were enemies, you say. Go at once, Valentine, before any scandal happens which may involve your name. So much, at least, we owe to Lady Mildred. I will get you a cab. Have you anything to pack?'

She obeyed. There was nothing that she

wished to take away. She transferred the care of Lotty to Melenda, kissed the girls, promised to return in a day or two, and hurried away, with the sense that something was going to happen.

Claude remained, watching in Mr. Lane's room, all the morning. Presently Lizzie came downstairs to see her father, and appeared neither astonished nor alarmed to hear that he had not been home all night. He had slept out before, when he had work to do. Claude told her nothing of what he knew or suspected. He must have gone down Whitechapel way, she said, among the German Jews, who regard not the Christian Sabbath when they want work done.

At one o'clock the 'Adelaide' opened its hospitable doors, and the old lady of the back ground-floor crossed the court, and proceeded to spend what was left of her florin. In half an hour she came out, with trembling lips and glassy eyes, and returned to her own room, where she flung herself upon the floor heavily, the door wide open, careless of the world, to sleep off the last drink she would get for six months, at least.

At two, Claude thought he would wait no longer. Perhaps his father might have gone to the Temple.

He had not—no one was there, and there were no traces at all of his presence. Nothing had been taken away, no tobacco was on the table, and there were no empty bottles. This was very strange. Surely something must have happened!

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOME AGAIN.

Claude withdrew from Ivy Lane. Heavens! without Valentine how desperately mean and squalid the place appeared! Even Melenda and Lizzie, now neat and 'respectable,' were incongruous amid such surroundings! As was Ivy Lane without her, so would be his whole life without her.

He stayed in his chambers all that Sunday afternoon, expecting a visit from his father. But there was no visit. What was he doing? And why had not the old letter-writer returned? All day he sat in the quiet rooms looking over the empty courts, while his feet were drawn as by a magnet towards the west of London. Persons who are afflicted with a constant drouth are drawn to public-houses as by strings; but lovers towards their mistresses by ropes and hawsers. When it drew dusk he went to his

club with a sense of safety because he could not be disturbed there, and after dinner he repaired to the house where he fain would be all day long.

'I am very glad to see you again, Claude.' Lady Mildred welcomed him with unwonted warmth. 'You have been a brother indeed, and more than a brother, to Valentine. She has told me all that you have done for her. And now, before you go to see the girls—Violet is very well and is longing to see you again—sit down and tell me something about your summer. I am afraid you have been a prisoner, from your own point of view. I want to know exactly what it is that Valentine has done. All I can get from her, except by parenthesis, is an enthusiastic account of what you have done. But you are looking ill, my dear boy; ill and worried. Is anything troubling you?'

'Yes; one or two things are troubling me a great deal. I will tell you about them afterwards.'

Then he began to talk about Valentine's life among these poor folk of Ivy Lane, and because it was a really fine theme, and he had

been watching the subject of it closely for three long months, during which he had thought of nothing else but the girl and her courage and her patience, he spoke eloquently and even with burning words. It was a rare spirit indeed which had persevered until Melenda was conquered, which had saved Lizzie and nursed Lotty. And if Claude's lips were touched with flame, and his eyes glowed, it was not only because he loved the damsel, but also because he admired her deeds.

Lady Mildred listened and watched him curiously, as if trying to read something unexpressed—something between the lines.

'And your own part in all this, Claude; you have not spoken of yourself.'

'Oh! my part. I am Valentine's servant; her Vizier.' But he hesitated and dropped his eyes, because he would have to confess that he had deliberately thrown away all those gods which formerly he had worshipped.

'More than a servant, Claude, I think. What is this I hear about your self-sacrifice?'

The young man blushed. Nobody likes to be suddenly accused of such a virtue as self-

sacrifice, which is at once rare, difficult of attainment, and much admired.

'It seems to me a very serious thing, this that you propose, my dear boy,' Lady Mildred went on. 'You have always been ambitious from the very beginning. Nobody has begun better than you; none of your contemporaries has a better chance. There is, I am assured by those who know, a really splendid prospect before you. Think well before you throw it away. There is a successful practice before you; in course of time, perhaps, a seat upon the Bench—even in the future a peerage—anything is possible for such a man as you—including, if you are wise enough to wait until success is assured, such a marriage, with such connections, as will advance your children as well as yourself. Wealth and distinction are as certainly within your grasp as can be humanly predicted, and you propose to throw them away. Are they things, then, of no value to you? Claude, if you have consented to this sacrifice only to please the whim of a girl, I cannot, I must not allow it to be carried into effect without remonstrance.'

'Valentine has no whims—she has purposes.

But, indeed, even if it was at first by her entreaties that I consented to change the plan of my life, that no longer remains the only reason. My old plans are abandoned of necessity—there is not left to me any choice but a life of obscurity.'

'Why have you no choice?'

'Do you remember, Lady Mildred, how, long ago, you took me to Westminster Abbey to hear a great preacher, and to see the tombs of great men? and to the Courts of Law to look at the judges and hear the barristers: and to the Academy to see the pictures—and to the theatres to see the play?—and how, everywhere, you fired my imagination by telling me that this, and this—and everything, was in my reach, if I desired it, and chose to work for it. You made me the most ambitious of boys. Besides, I had to justify things—certain things—my education.'

'You have nobly justified those things, Claude!'

'There never seemed to me anything in the world worth living for, except distinction and success. And now I have to give up all.'

'Why, Claude?'

'I cannot pretend that it is for the sake of my own people—for unselfish motives—I thought I might pretend that, until a fortnight ago. And I cannot pretend that it was for love of a girl, though there is nothing in the world I would not do for Valentine's sake.'

'Claude!'

'No, Lady Mildred, she is not my sister—she thinks she may be, but I know better—my brother Joe told me the truth. He recognised Violet's resemblance to her father and his own daughter, and I love Valentine. One moment, please. I can no longer think that I am giving up my ambition for her sake. I am only a man who must live in obscurity; I am condemned to it because I am overshadowed by a great social disgrace.'

'What disgrace, Claude? What possible disgrace can have fallen upon you?'

'It has become impossible that I should continue to live any longer among gentlemen. I can no longer pretend to associate with them. I must not, for common decency's sake, sit with them or talk with them; I ought not to have come here even, without letting you know the truth before I came. But I only found it

out three or four weeks ago. It is my father' —he stopped short with cheeks aflame, for it was a most horrible thing to put into words— 'my father is not dead, as I always thought, and as you were told. He has been in prison all these years; he is not an honest man, as my brother Joe always declared; he is a liberated convict: he is at large, with a ticket of leave.'

'Oh! Claude! my poor boy, is this true?'

'Yes. He first made himself known to Valentine, whom he took for his own daughter; she stood between him and my mother, who does not know—yet. She bribed him to silence: I know all now. Valentine had a terrible time with him. Then he broke her conditions and came to me, unknown to her, to my chambers, to the Temple. I dare say he is there at this moment, drinking and smoking. He takes my money: he pawns my things: he comes at all hours of the day and night. Now you know, Lady Mildred, the trouble that has fallen upon me.'

'My poor boy!' she repeated.

'If I do anything or succeed at all, he will be at my elbow, selling his own silence. He

takes a delight in the shame he inflicts upon me. He is, I firmly believe—though he is my own father—the worst man that lives. Oh! can there be,' he cried, with a despairing gesture of shame and pain, 'can there be—is there anywhere, in this great city, a man nearer to the gutter than myself? Now you understand why I must go away and hide myself. If I do any work it must be for the people from whom I sprang—if only in atonement—it must be work that will never be spoken about. Is it for me to have ambition? Is such a man as myself to ask for distinction? Why, if I were a Judge to-morrow, I might have to try my own father. My only friends should be the men like myself, whose fathers are in the gaols—the sons of the burglars and thieves of London. And now, Lady Mildred, you understand, do you not, why I am not ashamed, since I have told you all this, to confess that I love Valentine. For a man so fettered and held in bonds might as well love a princess. All day long I hear my father's voice, that mocks at everything honest and true; all day long I say to myself, "Go back to the slums and work for those who are like

yourself, children of the gaol-birds and the outcasts; " and at night I lie awake, waiting for the sound of his footsteps in my room.'

'Claude, my poor boy!'

'I trust only that Violet will never learn the truth. As for the others, sooner or later they will learn it, I suppose. One cannot always keep such a man back, and very soon he will have taken all the money I have.'

'Violet shall never know if I can prevent it. And as for yourself——'

'As for me, my course is clear. What other men do for a few years and of free choice, able to take up and lay down as they please, I must do all my life, and by compulsion. And as for Valentine, I shall go on being her servant. You will trust me, I know you will trust me, never to let her suspect, by any word of mine, that I regard her other than a sister. I have endeavoured—I have always hoped and endeavoured—to be a gentleman.'

'Thank you, Claude.' She pressed his hand with both her own in a kindly and motherly fashion. 'You learned very early, my dear son, the instincts of a gentleman—there is nothing finer in the world than to be

a gentleman—and I have always trusted you and always loved you. Oh! my poor boy, I am so sorry for you.' For the first time Lady Mildred kissed him. She laid her hands upon his shoulders and drew his face to her and kissed him on the forehead, while her eyes were full of tears.

Claude turned his head to hide his own. 'I am glad,' he said, 'that I have told you. I can bear it better now that you know.'

'Yes, it is better to tell things to people who love you. As for Valentine, she will always love you—as your sister. I am sure of that. It is good for a young man to love a girl, if she is worthy of him, though he can never win her. Go on loving my daughter, Claude, and, if you please, believe her to be everything that a woman can be, this side the Gates of Heaven.'

'And now,' she added, 'forget your troubles. We will all take counsel how to bribe this man into voluntary exile. You shall be protected somehow. And Violet shall never know; and now go and make the girls happier, Claude. They are longing for you.'

It was immediately after this that Lady

Mildred explained some of her views on the situation to her friend and confidante.

'My dear Mildred,' said the latter, 'I cannot believe that any good can come of a girl going to live by herself among the scum.'

'The scum, Bertha, rises to the top.'

'Then the grounds, or the settlings of society, with the drunken and disreputable people, unprotected. Think of the wickedness she must learn.'

'Yes, I suppose that Valentine knows already much more wickedness than both of us put together. It is strange to think of it. Yet the knowledge does not seem to do her any harm. She is as sweet as ever and as good, though she looks more womanly. I dare say Eve looked more womanly after she had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but she would look guilty as well, which my child does not.'

'No, poor thing!'

'When you and I were born, Bertha, our fathers mostly called the people the Mob, or the Common People, or the Lower Orders, or the Lower Classes. They laughed at their

ignorance, and expected one thing only of them—respect. Things are changed.'

'They are indeed!'

'We cannot afford to laugh at the ignorance of the people any more, because we have given them all the power, though they don't know yet that they have got it; but they will find out very soon, and then——'

'Oh, Mildred! don't say there is going to be a horrid Revolution, and that we shall all be swallowed up.'

'We have had a long rope if we are to be swallowed up. But I am not afraid of the English people. And as for the Revolution it has been quietly going on all around us for a hundred years. They will take away class power, and curtail the power of land and capital, Bertha, but they will not guillotine us. We are an orderly people, and do not want to murder each other. But the more we, of our set, learn what working people want and think, and how they judge things, and the more they, for their part, learn what we think about things, the better it will be for all of us, and the safer. Valentine has learned things which she will never forget. Do you think that if

there were many girls like her, the workmen of this country could be made, by any stump orator, to look upon rich people as their natural enemies?'

'I like the old ways best,' said Bertha. 'Let the working man go his way, so long as he behaves himself, and let us go our way. But what will you do about Claude? Of course, if Valentine should turn out not to be his sister after all, they cannot go on together as they have done.'

'That will be for Valentine to determine.'

'But, my dear, the young man might so far forget himself as to fall in love with her.'

'It will be Valentine's business. She will do as she pleases.'

'Would you? But you could not let your daughter marry a young man who has such family connections—a workman brother and a working-girl sister?'

'My dear, I think a woman can never do better than marry a distinguished man. I married Sir Lancelot because everybody said he was distinguished. He has been dead nearly twenty years, and everybody has clean forgotten him, so that, I suppose, there are certain

kinds of distinctions which don't last. But as for Claude, I am sure that he will distinguish himself in a way that does last. If one of the girls—the one who is not his sister—were to marry him, she might advance him.'

'But of course they will both love him merely as a brother, which is a safeguard.'

'I don't know. The true sisterly feeling does not grow up in three months. It wants the long years of childhood.'

'We have said nothing about Violet,' said Bertha, after a little.

'What about Violet?'

'I mean about her future, if she should be Claude's sister.'

'Violet in any case will remain with me. She has the artistic temperament, which naturally dislikes rude realities and shrinks from rough people. Artists are full of emotion and sympathy because they are quick to see; yet they are generally touched with a kind of selfishness of their own, which also belongs to the temperament. Now Valentine is not an artist; she neglects the rags, whether they are picturesque or not, and looks for the man below them; she will go back to the rags and

roughness, but Violet will remain. Claude will go with Valentine, sister or no sister, and Violet will stay with me.'

'And now I am quite sure,' said Bertha, quickly, 'that if Valentine had not been your own daughter, you would not have sent her on this Quixotic errand.'

'You will know to-morrow.'

'Yes,' Bertha repeated, 'I am quite sure. You would never have incurred the terrible responsibility of risking another person's child. Yes. You are a clever woman, Mildred, but I have discovered your secret at last. Well, the son of the soil goes back to the soil. That is wonderful, considering what he must remember about the place. It is not wonderful at all that Violet should refuse to return, though she cannot remember anything, because she can imagine. But it is to me inexplicable that Valentine should have wanted to go down there at all, and still more wonderful that she should want to return there.'

'Here is Claude at last,' cried Violet, 'Claude at last! Oh, Claude.' She gave him both her hands, and would have liked nothing

better than to kiss him on both cheeks. 'How glad I am to see you again, and Valentine again! Is it really you? Sometimes I thought it was all a dream and that there never was any Claude. You have made Val thin, Claude, and you are thin yourself. And she has been having grave fits and telling me dreadful stories about working girls, poor things.'

At that moment Valentine was not grave at all. To be back again in the old home atmosphere; to put on again a dress that was not the plain grey or brown stuff she had worn for three months, but the same dress, or something like it, in which Claude had first seen her, a sweet and dainty confection of white, with lace; and to be again with Violet, filled her with happiness. To Claude she was always more than mortal. And now she was more than a goddess. And she was laughing. Alas! had he ever once succeeded in making her laugh during the whole three months that they had been together every day? Could this really be the same girl who only twenty-four hours since was shrinking in terror from his—his father—Violet's father?

'I think it must have been a dream,' Valentine said, 'unless, perhaps, everything is a

dream. The summer, in that case, is only just going to begin; it is still June and we are considering where we shall go. It is like the last scene in the opera, which is the same as the first, and the heroine wakes up to find that it has all been a dream. I suppose there is not any such place as Ivy Lane, is there, Claude? Was there ever a tall old man with grey hair named Mr. Lane? He had a daughter in my dream called Lizzie, and there was a girl named Melenda, and another named Lotty—poor Lotty.'

'And another pretending to be Polly-which-is-Marla,' said Violet. 'No, dear, it isn't a dream, and I have had the most dismal time you can possibly conceive. She looks much too pale, Claude. Do you think she has had enough to eat? O! Val, how could you live three months by yourself, and among those horrid people? I hope my relatives behaved with tolerable decency towards you. Did Melenda tear the clothes off your back? Did Sam make you a Socialist? Did Joe treat you civilly? Tell me, Claude, were they nice at all?'

'Melenda is now my dearest friend,' said

Valentine. 'You would not know her if you saw her now.'

'Oh!' The little interjection implied that Violet had no desire to know that young lady more intimately. 'And she has done everything for herself, Claude. Do you think you ought to have permitted it?'

'I am rather ashamed now,' said Valentine, 'of having a lady's-maid.'

'She has actually cleaned her own windows and washed her own cups and saucers. Yet she hasn't spoiled her hands. Why do all housemaids have red hands, then?'

'I confess that I did not really like cleaning up. But it is soon done, and it gives very little trouble.'

'That depends upon the person,' said Violet; 'to me it would give all the trouble in the world. I want everything provided for me, clean, bright, pretty and finished, just as if things grew so, and would always remain so. I don't want to know who made them—no doubt, unpleasant people—or how they came. I like to have everything made for me, brought to me, and presented to me, as a matter of course, just as if I was a Princess by Divine

Right. And oh! if I were a Princess, how fervently I should believe in Divine Right!'

'My dear, you will always have everything just exactly as if you were a Princess.'

'Instead of a——'

'No, Violet, you shall not say it. The strange thing is the way in which mistakes are made and young Princesses get mixed up and served out wrong. Now I am certain that Melenda was meant for a Despotic Sovereign. She would have made an admirable Czarina in the days when they chopped off heads without trial. And Lizzie was born, I am sure, to be a fashionable young lady.'

'And what about that other girl who looked delicate and was lying down?'

'She is dying, Violet,' said Claude, gravely.

'Poor thing! I suppose there is always somebody dying there. We must send her grapes, Val dear.'

Violet belonged to that large school of philanthropists who would treat every painful case with half-a-crown and a basket of grapes. And so great is their sympathy with those who suffer that they cannot bear even to think of them, much less to talk about them.

'There is tragedy as well as comedy at Hoxton,' said Claude.

Then they fell to talking again in a lighter strain, and they were so happy at being together again that they talked the greatest nonsense imaginable. Claude forgot his troubles and laughed with them, though, for all three, the tears were close behind the laughter, just as in the pools which are sometimes geysers, the bubbles on the surface show the agitation of the waters below. As for Valentine, this return to an atmosphere of peace, where there could be careless talk, was like the wandering down a green glade, beside a little brook, with the birds singing and the flowers at her feet, after a long sojourn in the hot and thirsty sands. She had never appreciated it before. This possibility of careless talk, as if there were no misery in the world that she could cure or cause, or that concerned her. An atmosphere of peace. It is, if you think of it, the choicest possession of the easy classes. Yet they share it with the shepherd on the hill side and the gamekeeper in the woods. Those who live in crowded streets and narrow courts, in tenement houses or in model lodgings, can never breathe

this atmosphere of peace. All around them is the buzz and humming of their fellows—not a peaceful murmur as of bees, but an angry, dissatisfied, suffering sound, made up of groans and oaths and lamentations, as well as of the laughter of children and the shouts of those who play.

And Claude was wondering whether the Valentine of this evening could be really the same girl, who, twenty-four hours before, stood in the doorway shrinking with terror from a half-drunken and unrepentant convict who called himself her father. In his inexperience, he made no allowance for Reaction. One is never so completely *folâtre* as on the day after a period of great anxiety. Gentlemen, for instance, who have been locked up for a short term are said to exhibit a larklike blitheness and vivacity at the 'friendly lead' which follows their release.

Then Claude wondered, looking at the two girls, how he could ever have entertained the least doubt as to the real Beatrice. For he saw now that the face of Violet was Joe's face, and his own face, and his father's face. And her voice was Joe's, and his own, and—his

father's ; a soft and sweet voice in her, and in the men a low and musical voice. How could anyone have ever doubted? To be sure, when he saw Violet for the first time he had not yet seen his father, and he thought less about Joe than about Melenda and Sam. Now Violet was not in the least like Sam and Melenda, who, as we know, 'favoured' their mother.

Authorities are divided as to whether at its best the masculine or the feminine countenance is the more perfect from the artistic point of view. Yet one would have liked, in the days when there was the strongest feeling on the subject, to have said unto Zeuxis: 'Just figure for me in undying colours the most beautiful girl-face that exists anywhere around the shores of the Mediterranean.' English girls about that time were still in the rough, somewhere among the Hercynian forests. 'Next, paint me the same face in its masculine form, and then the same face as a child, as a boy, as a girl, and as an old man, and as an old woman, so that in every age we may have the most perfect type of beauty.' I think that Violet would have done very well for the first type and Claude for the second. Horrible to think

of the same face grown old and marked with the seal that stamps the prison bird! His own face, Claude clearly discerned, and his father's face, were both so plainly drawn in Violet's, that he wondered how there could ever have been the slightest doubt. But very few, of those concerned, had had the pleasure of making Mr. James Carey's personal acquaintance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FINDING OF THE INQUEST.

When Claude went back to his chambers, he was disappointed in not finding them already occupied by an elderly gentleman with grey hair and a fiddle in his hand, and a pipe in his mouth. He fully expected to find that gentleman in occupation; he expected to hear him fiddling as he went up the stairs; in fact, he made up his mind while walking home what he should say to him, and he arranged a dramatic scene, short but very effective. He would begin by saying, firmly and calmly, 'You have broken the conditions. I shall therefore discontinue your allowance. You will get no more money from your supposed daughter; and I will take care that the others shall give you nothing. If you attempt to worry my mother she shall be taken out of the almshouse, and placed under proper

protection.' At this point his parent would probably break out into that rude eloquence which is known in Ivy Lane as 'language.'

Then Claude would go on—'I will, however, allow you twenty-five shillings a week, on the condition that you go out of the country—to Guernsey, or Jersey, or somewhere.' A certain amount of filial piety (how much filial piety ought to be expected towards a father who turns out so badly?) would suffer him to be regardless of the language, but he would be firm in refusing to give him anything, except on that one condition. Filial piety, he was sure, was consistent with starving a parent into submission, so long as submission is good for his children. This reduction of obstinacy once effected, one might again consider the Fifth Commandment and its bearings on the case, and how one might contrive to scrape together, somehow, in obedience to the Injunction, a little, if ever so little, honour for one's father; just as the toper squeezes the empty bottle and the miser skins the flin.

Somehow these previously arranged dialogues and dramatic situations never come

off as they are intended, so that one always has to fall back upon impromptu words and unforeseen tableaux.

His chambers were empty; the windows were dark; there was no one in King's Bench walk, except the ghosts of the dead lawyers, who have long since driven away the ghosts of the Knights Templars, and now walk nightly in wigs and gowns, a merry troop, laughing and telling each other the old circuit stories of which barristers are never tired; the stairs echoed to no other footsteps than his own; no one waited for him on the landing: there was no one in the room.

Well, his father had only postponed his visit, that was clear; he would come in the night, or next day, or the day after, because no more money would be sent to him, and he must sooner or later come to terms, because he had no means of getting any. That he would go to Tottenham appeared unlikely, because there was nothing to be got out of a poor old almswoman. There was, indeed, another possibility, which Claude did not take into account, as it was a thing quite outside his own experience. He forgot that his father had a

profession—not, it is true, one of the learned professions, but yet a profession which requires the greatest dexterity, a brain full of resource, an eye keen to watch for opportunity, vulpine stealth, and that kind of natural aptitude, which, when applied to the arts of poetry, the drama, and fiction, we call Genius. What was there to prevent Mr. Carey from resuming the active practice of that profession? This, indeed, conducted with the greatest caution, and, if necessary, supplemented by an occasional levy upon his son and daughter, was the scheme of life contemplated by the enlarged captive. He nourished thoughts, also, of a second course of public glory; he would again be the head of the profession. Fate, as too often happens, prevented the accomplishment of this design; otherwise, the end of Mr. Carey's history and of this story would have been different.

Then Claude, with dismal forebodings of a nocturnal visit, went to bed. The Temple was perfectly quiet; there was no noise from the river, which by day is not at all a silent highway, and none from the Embankment; there were no steps on the gravel and in the

court below. He lay awake waiting for the soft footfall which he knew and dreaded, or for the light click of the burglar's key unlocking his door; once or twice he thought that the man must be actually in his rooms, and he got up and looked into his keeping room in order to satisfy himself. Two or three more such nights as this and he should go mad; when at length he did fall asleep, worn out by the long vigil of Saturday night and by his own anxieties, it was to dream that his father stood by his bedside threatening that he would never leave him, that he would remain with him night and day, all the rest of his life, that he would never be out of his sight or out of his thoughts for a single moment.

That dream will in a way be fulfilled; Claude will never cease to have his father with him; he 'can never' be out of his thoughts. Yet this nightmare will not come true in the sense in which it was first understood.

All the morning he remained in his chambers, expecting this visitor, or at least a letter or some kind of message, if only a threatening message. None came at all. The very silence itself was threatening, and all the

more because its threatenings were as vague and uncertain as the distant roll of thunder.

In the afternoon Claude resolved to wait within no longer. He would go to Tottenham and satisfy himself that his mother had not been molested.

She had not. He found her walking with her granddaughter Rhoda, in the sunshine on the flags. She was quite calm and undisturbed, there was no reason for asking her any questions.

Her husband had not been near her, that was certain, since the day when Valentine bought him off. But for her part she asked a thousand questions about Lady Mildred, and how her daughter had been received, and when she would come back again to see her mother.

'I wouldn't stand in her light, Claude, not if I was never to see her again.' Like all blind people she spoke of seeing her friends just as if she still had the use of her eyes. 'And if she's happy she must not think too much about me. Not but that she will, for she's that affectionate in her nature that she loves all that loves her and thinks about them day and night. Give me a loving-hearted girl, Claude. Why, as for

you she loves the very ground you tread upon.' Claude started and blushed; one need not blush at being loved by one's sister, but only Rhoda saw the blush, and she was selfishly thinking about her own little ambitions, not about Claude at all. And therefore, though she observed some evidence of emotion, she did not connect it with any cause. 'If you were her sweetheart, my son, she couldn't love you better. She'll sit and talk about you all day long, she will, and never get tired; and makes me tell her again and again, just like as if she was a little girl again, how you took to your book when you was only a little boy, and how you were sent to a grand school by her ladyship, and how you got all the prizes and brought them here for me to see and feel their beautiful leather covers. Oh! she's a good sister, Claude, as well as a good daughter.'

'I suppose she loves Joe and Sam quite as well.'

'Not she, then. She's uppish you know, and Joe, he's a good boy, but he's only a working man, you see. He hasn't got your fine ways; and as for Sam, he's hardly civil with anybody, is he?'

'I am glad you think she loves me, mother, said Claude, meekly. 'But then, of course it's natural to love her brother, isn't it?'

'Of course it is, my dear. You don't make half enough of her, Claude. As for talking about her, you never do. Nor about yourself either, lately. You've got to be silent, my dear boy. There isn't any trouble, is there? You haven't got caught by some artful hussy, I hope?'

In Mrs. Monument's view, if one of her sons fell in love, he must be caught by an artful hussy. Such is the opinion which women in certain circles entertain as to girls and their wiles. To be sure, a mother is difficult to please in the matter of daughters-in-law.

'No, mother, there is no artful hussy in the case, I assure you. And as for loving Valentine, I am certain no brother in the whole world loves his sister so much. I can say nothing too good for her. Never dream that I do not think about Valentine, mother.'

'That's well said, Claude. That's a brave boy. Brothers don't generally care about their sisters, more's the pity. If they did there'd be many a poor girl saved from trouble.'

Then Claude went to Ivy Lane, getting there about six o'clock, just before dark. It struck him that the street was unusually animated for the time of day, and he might have guessed that so many people would not have been gathered together at six in the evening without some cause. However, he passed through them, and so to the house. The front room was still empty, and from the position of the chair, which was exactly where he had left it, it seemed as if no one had been there since he left it. Therefore the old man had not yet returned. He looked into the back room; this also was empty. In fact the old lady, who could no longer do without a fire, had that very morning changed her residence for the winter and gone where, whatever may be their faults, they do keep up a good fire, namely, to the House; and was already dressed in the blue and white check which forms the neat and tasty uniform of the place, and had consumed in gin the last twopence of Mr. Carey's florin, and was looking forward with resignation to six or seven months of temperance and regular hours.

Claude went upstairs. Melenda's room was

open, but no one was in it. Melenda herself was sitting in Valentine's room with Lotty, who was asleep.

She ran to meet Claude with some signs of agitation.

'Oh, Claude!' Melenda came out hurriedly, 'I am so glad you are come again. Something dreadful's happened. Hush! I don't want Lotty to hear.'

'What is it?'

'It's Lizzie's father. He's dead.'

'How did he die?'

'I don't know. It was this morning that a policeman came and asked if there was a man lived here named Lane, and we called Liz, and she said yes, and he was her father; and he said, "Then your father's dead," he said, "and you'd better come along o' me," he said; and she went. And I can't leave Lotty, and there's nobody in the house but us two. Oh! dear. I never thought we should miss Valentine so soon.'

Outside the house the people were talking together in knots of two and three. They spoke in low voices, as people talk in the presence of the dead.

Now, while Claude looked about him for some one to ask or to advise him, there strolled leisurely into the street none other than his brother Joe.

'You here, Joe?'

'Why, Colonel,' said Joe, slowly, 'I sez to myself when we knocked off to-day, I sez, "There's Melenda with that sick girl, and the young lady gone, and p'raps they want a bit of help or advice.' So I came down the road in the tram, and here I am.'

'Well, Joe, it strikes me that we shall all want as much advice and help as we can get before very long.'

'I beg your pardon, sir'—one of the women detached herself from the group and accosted Claude; 'you knew the poor old man, sir. I've seen you here with the young lady.'

'Yes, I knew the old man; what has happened?'

'They picked him up in the canal, and they've got him at the "Stag's Head" in the Canal Road. Lizzie's gone there too, for the inquest.'

Found in the canal! Claude felt sick and dizzy. How did the man get there? and in whose company was he last seen?

'What's the matter, young un?' asked Joe, surprised. 'What makes you so white in the gills?'

'Come with me, Joe; I'm afraid we shall find out soon enough.'

In the parlour of the 'Stag's Head,' on the great table dented and battered with a thousand hammerings of pewter pots at friendly leads and the emphasisings of a thousand toasts at lodge meetings—for a lodge of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes met here—and club meetings, there lay a shapeless heap, covered over with a white sheet. A policeman sat in the room, not for fear of those who break in and steal, but out of respect to what was under the sheet. In a far corner—as far as she could get from the table—sat Lizzie, looking scared and frightened.

'Oh!' she cried, 'you've come at last—I knew you'd come. Don't go away, please. There's to be an inquest directly and I've got to give evidence. Oh! I am so frightened.'

'Don't be afraid, my gal,' said Joe; 'we won't go away till you've done.'

'Father's dead,' she whispered.

'I know,' said Claude. 'But, Lizzie, is

there no other place than this for you to wait?'

'There's only the Bar, but it's full of men drinking, and they keep asking questions.'

'How was it?'

'I don't know. They are there—under the sheet. You can look if you like.'

'Who are they?'

'Why, the other—I don't know who he is. They found them together.'

'If you knew the deceased, either of you,' said the policeman, 'you might give evidence. The jury are called for half-past seven.'

He laid back a corner of the sheet and showed the face of the dead man. It was perfectly calm and peaceful; the lips had dropped into a smile; the eyes were closed in what looked like the sleep of a child. The long white hair lay upon the pillow on which they had placed his head, as if reverent hands had disposed it to the best advantage, so as to serve as a frame for the beautiful waxen mask of a face. The poor old scribe had got what he demanded of his enemy; he had got back his life. What more could he desire?

'Oh! isn't father beautiful?' Lizzie whis-

pered. 'He was a gentleman once, before he got into trouble. Don't he look like a gentleman again?'

He looked perfectly peaceful and happy. He looked like one who had spent his life wholly in the contemplation of things saintly and the working of things holy. The dead Bishop lying on his bed could not look more holy. But there was more beneath the sheet.

The policeman rolled back the sheet a little further and discovered a second head. There was, as Lizzie explained, another body found with her father's. It lay upon its side facing the first. The limbs were writhing when they were fixed in death; the face was distorted, wild, and full of horror, with open and staring eyes which still seemed to see something inexpressibly terrible and fearful. The right hand of the first corpse held the coat collar of the second as if dragging an unwilling and conscience-stricken prisoner to justice.

This was Claude's father. A terrible death after a shameful life. The thought that it was his father, whatever the life, whatever the death, touched him with such pity as one might feel for one who was not a disgraceful father. All

was finished now, the persecution, and the extortion, and the dread. No more to be feared from him. Only room now for the thought of what he might have been.

'That's just how they were found,' said the Policeman, 'only this one's left hand you see was clutching the other side of the coat collar as well, but the hook tore the collar. No one saw them roll in: no one seems to know how they fell in. Looks like a quarrel, don't it? But they're both oldish men, and the one with the grey hair looks near seventy. Men of seventy don't quarrel and fight, do they? Not as a rule, says you. The young woman here is ready to identify her father, but no one seems to know anything about the other man. Looks respectable, doesn't he? Got new boots, and good boots too, and new clothes. Here's his hat'—too well Claude knew that hat! 'It was picked up on the bank. Oldish man, but he looks as if he'd got a good bit o' life left in him still: wiry kind of face, isn't it? Didn't like tumbling in, seemingly. Was it one tried to push the other in? Were they in drink? Nothing in their pockets; not a penny; only a scrap of paper in this one's pocket with the name

of Lane, Ivy Lane, Hoxton, on it. Not a penny: at least that's what the bargees say who pulled 'em out. 'Tain't likely there would be a penny after they'd had the run of the pockets.' Claude thought of asking whether there had not been found a watch and chain—his own watch and chain, in fact—but he refrained in time. 'Why, man alive,' said the policeman to Joe, 'haven't you ever seen a dead body before?'

In fact, Joe was gazing with open mouth and hanging hands: his cheeks were white, and he seemed unable to tear his eyes from the sight before him. Just so, Claude felt, he must himself have appeared when first his father announced himself in his chambers. In the feeling and beautiful language of our ancestors, Joe 'was confounded, and his jaws stuck.'

'Why, Joe,' said Claude, 'what's the matter? Sit down, man, and don't look at them any longer.' He covered the bodies again with the sheet. 'Nothing at all in this man's pockets. Nothing in his pockets. No letter, or card, or address. Why, perhaps you will not be able to identify him.'

'Perhaps not,' said the policeman. 'As for this one, we know him through his daughter.'

'We know him too,' said Claude. 'We are come to do what we can for his daughter.'

'And as for the other, why, very likely he'll never be identified at all; there's a many bodies that never do. They are country people, for the most part, and they get into bad company and mischief; or they're foreigners perhaps, and it's bad company with them, too; and no one asks after them, and when they don't come back to their hotels, presently their boxes are opened and sold, and nothing said.'

'Very likely he will never be identified at all,' Claude repeated, slowly and with emphasis, looking at his brother. 'Joe, do you feel better? We both know this girl, who is very respectable, and there will be no difficulty in identifying her father, at any rate.'

Joe retired to the bar, where he had a glass of brandy neat, and tried to pull himself together, but with small success. For he had seen his father again. After all these years, he remembered him instantly—and his father was dead.

As regards his former statement concerning his father's death it had been, of course, fabricated and invented by himself without the least

authority. He made that statement for the ease and satisfaction of his mother. When a man of over forty goes into compulsory retirement for a period of five-and-twenty years, which is equivalent to twenty years at least, one may be justified in supposing that he will never come out again; though, from time to time, Joe asked himself what would happen if his father were after all to come out and to find his way to the almshouse, and what his own missus would say, and what Claude and Sam and Melenda, from all of whom the truth had been carefully hidden, would say. Once the fiction was invented, Joe satisfied his conscience, which was not more than reasonably tender, by the assurance that his father could never live to complete his sentence.

He had lived, then, and he had presumably received his ticket of leave, and he was out. How long he had been out, or what he had done since he came out, what friends he had made, who knew his secrets, Joe knew not. His father was out of prison, and he was dead; he was discovered drowned like a rat in a ditch. Suppose the policeman were to ask him if he knew the body. Suppose they were to seize

him and put him in the witness-box, what should he say? Why had he come there with Claude?

Presently the jury came and the inquest was held. They were mostly householders who kept small shops in the neighbourhood; they came rather sulkily, but they went through the business conscientiously, and as if they had experience of coroners' inquests, and how they should be conducted.

The court was held in a dingy room—the bar-parlour—after the jury had viewed the bodies. Claude and Joe stood in the doorway and looked on. The witnesses were called; the two boatmen who deposed that they saw a hat lying on the towing-path, and the marks of the trampling of feet, or some kind of struggle, on the gravel; that they dragged the canal, and almost immediately pulled up the two bodies locked together in a deadly embrace just as they now lay upon the table; one man holding the other as if he were trying to shove him under—that they searched the pockets and found nothing except in one pocket, writing materials with a name and address; both men were very clear and decided upon that point;

that they had called the nearest policeman, who also searched the pockets and found nothing. The policeman, in his evidence, did not express surprise on this point. Then they put up Lizzie, who identified her father as one who lived by writing letters for Germans and Poles, especially Polish Jews; he was very poor, she said, and as for the other man, she had never seen him, and her father was one of those who have no friends. It was fortunate, Claude reflected, that Lizzie had not been present at the disturbance on Saturday evening.

He might himself have given evidence. But to what effect? That he was a Barrister and a Fellow of Trinity: that one of the dead men was his own father, a ticket-of-leave man and a notorious evil liver, whom he was himself supporting on certain conditions; that this convict broke one of these conditions on Saturday evening, and forced himself upon a young lady, the daughter of Lady Mildred Eldridge, whom he took for his own daughter; that at sight of the other man, now also lying dead, he broke away and fled, and the other ran after him, and that they were no more seen. This was a strange story to tell in this Bar

Parlour before the Hoxton Jurymen. Further inquiry would be demanded, and Valentine herself would have to give evidence, and then there would be a beautiful case for the papers.

Joe, too, might have given evidence. He stood in terror that he should be called upon to do so. His evidence would at least have satisfied the police that one of their worst offenders was gone to another Court of Justice. He listened with open mouth and pale cheeks. When the Coroner charged the Jury, he trembled and shook; when the Verdict was returned, he gave a great gasp of relief.

As for the summing up of the Coroner, nothing could be more simple. These two men, he said, were evidently drowned together. They might have been quarrelling, but there was nothing to prove it; they might have been drinking together, which seemed much more likely, because they had not apparently robbed each other, neither having anything to lose. One of the men—the one identified—was very old and feeble; the other was well advanced in life. The one identified appeared also to be quiet and respectable. Men of that age do not

certainly go out and fight when they are sober ; the very unfrequented nature of the place where they were found pointed perhaps to the theory of drink. One slipped, perhaps, and dragged the other in with him ; or one was drowned in an attempt to save the other. As for the uncalled-for remark of the bargemen that it looked as if one was trying to shove the other under, that was a conclusion formed without any facts to warrant it, and they might just as well consider that it looked as if one man was trying to pull the other out. The Jury without any delay found a verdict of 'Found drowned'; and to this verdict every man affixed his name and seal.

The case was over. No one now will ever know, except his two sons, when and where James Carey died: and they know no more than that he was drowned.

As they walked away, Joe, who had taken a second glass of brandy after the finding, and yet looked pale and trembled, began to explain things.

'You saw that I was took aback, young 'un, by the sight of them two bodies?' he began.

'Yes, I saw that, Joe. Very much took aback you were.'

'Well, now, don't you tell the mother what I'm going to tell you. Don't you let on to no one, Claude, and I will tell you the truth, and why I was took aback. Which I do not deny it.'

'I will not tell anybody, Joe. Go on.'

Claude perceived from his brother's anxious face as well as from the general situation, that Joe's imaginative and creative faculties were about to be called into play, on a larger and more active scale than usual.

'Well, then, it's like this. Father, you know——'

'Who died so many years ago.'

'Yes, him. Who died so many years ago, poor old chap! I don't think, Claude, I ever quite got over the blow of his death; for, says I, though but a youngster at the time, where in the world shall I ever find another father who'll be such a honest and respectable father as him who's been took? But what you never have been told, nor any of the others, is, that father had a brother. That's where it is. Yes, he had a brother—a twin brother—just exactly

like himself: same age, same height, same hair, same coloured eyes. So like him that you might have taken them two for each other. People have been known to make that mistake; and once he—the twin brother, I mean—got off, because he got fifty people to swear he was handing round the plate at chapel at the very time that the burglary was committed—namely, church-time. But, bless you, it was father, not him, that carried round the plate! They wouldn't ha' trusted him with a plate if there was only twopence in it. Besides, he never went to church nor chapel. If they had a trusted him with the plate, he'd a sneaked it, money and all.'

The narrator felt that he was really getting on splendidly.

'Well, Joe?'

'Well—father—you know—father—he was just about as steady and as honest as they make 'em. Once they gave him a silver mug for his honesty, and it was put into the Sunday papers. I remember that very well.'

'Yes, Joe, I think I remember something of it, too.'

'You can't very well, Claude—that is, you

can't remember much of it, because it was before you were born. But you go on being proud of your father. You stick as tight as wax to your pride, my boy.'

'I will, Joe—I will. I'll be just as proud of him as if he had never had a twin brother at all.'

'Well, as for that precious twin—that other chap—he was a reg'lar bad 'un. He was so bad that father never let him come into the house where, he said, honesty alone should shake a leg.' Claude laughed, but begged his brother to continue. 'Whatever good there was about father was bad about that other chap. If one was sober, the other drank like a fish; and if one was a steady workman, the other one never did a day's work in his life; if one got silver mugs for good character, the other was always going off to quod for roguery. He was a burglar too, and proud of it. Father got at last not to speak to him—wouldn't own to him—wouldn't help him—wouldn't have nothing to say to him. But it made no difference, whether father argued with him or whether he walloped him it was all the same. A reg'lar confirmed bad 'un, he was.'

'I suppose he got into trouble pretty often, didn't he?'

'He did so, Claude. He got into trouble a heap of times; he was most always in trouble, and at last he got a long sentence. I thought he must be dead, Claude, I did indeed. And what struck me all of a heap, sudden-like, when I see that body was to reckonise that it was nothing else in the world but the body of that —very—same—twin brother. There! Now you know why I was took aback. I thought he was dead ever so long ago. And if I'd had to give evidence I should ha' had to say that he was father's twin brother—a ticket-of-leave man, Claude'—his voice dropped—'on'y a ticket-o'-leave man.'

'That was very strange, Joe. Hadn't we better keep this story to ourselves? There are always bad hats in every family, and it does no good to talk about them, does it? Besides, considering we've had a father who is such a credit to all of us that we are never tired of talking about him, what does it matter about this uncle—this twin brother?'

'Right, lad, right,' cried Joe, brightening up. 'What does it matter, after all? We

won't tell Sam, will we? Nor yet Melenda, nor yet my missus and the young 'uns. There's no need to let 'em know now, and him dead and all, that their father's twin brother was such an out-and-out reg'lar bad un.'

Joe's readiness of invention thus extricated him from a great difficulty, and he has ever since congratulated himself upon his resource and the fertility of his imagination, which enabled him so readily to make Claude believe in the existence of the twin brother—the out-an'-outer, and in the exemplary character of his father.

It is the privilege of the parish to bury, at the expense of the ratepayers, such persons as die poor or friendless within their borders. The parish funeral is not a costly matter; the parish undertaker does not generally retire from business with a large fortune; and things are not always ordered at these functions with as much solemnity as the relations might desire. Therefore it was felt to be a kindly act when Claude undertook to provide the funeral expenses for both these poor men. He 'followed' in person, accompanied by Lizzie, who was supported by Melenda. Joe did not

appear. Thus, the hawk and the pigeon, the wolf and the lamb, lay down in death, side by side, together.

In such a case as this, the words of the funeral service produce upon the bystanders something of an incongruous effect. Did Mr. James Carey really entertain the sure and certain hope spoken of by the Chaplain at the last moment when his soul came bubbling up to the surface of the dark canal? Did he hear that voice that cried, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord?' Pity that prayers for the dead are not encouraged by the Church; one would have preferred, for such a funeral service, a few words of supplication in the deepest humility on behalf of a sinner most horribly unrepentant, together with a word of thankfulness on behalf of those from whom his death had averted so much misery and disgrace.

Claude gave to each of the girls a wreath. 'Lay yours,' he whispered to Lizzie, 'on the stranger's coffin. Say, "I have forgiven."'

Lizzie did as she was told, thinking it was part of the service.

'Lay yours on Lizzie's father, Melenda,'

he whispered her. 'Say, "Forgive the father for the daughter's sake."'

Melenda, too, did as she was told. She knew that there was a mystery and that it was Valentine's secret. Therefore she made no search into it, and never spoke of it, and no one, now, knows the complete history of James Carey and Mr. Lane except Claude and Valentine, and, as we have seen, even they do not know all the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COMING OF AGE.

NEVER was there any coming of age which more nearly resembled a funeral. The daughter of Sir Lancelot Eldridge should have attained her majority in her own country house ; there should have been joy-bells and treble bob-majors, Venetian masts with streamers and flags, bands of music, bouquets for everybody, dances on the village green, treats for the children, sports and athletics for the young men, a great ball at the house and half the county invited to it, and, to crown the whole, the heartfelt, outspoken rejoicings of an affectionate, grateful, loyal, contented, industrious, respectful, and scrupulously clean tenantry and peasantry. We all know how respectful, loyal, and affectionate are the peasantry and tenantry of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

The family Solicitor came, a young gentle-

man of thirty or so, accompanied by his Junior Partner, who was not quite so young by forty years or so, and carrying a great box of papers. They arrived at about eleven, and were taken into the library. The girls heard their steps, and felt somehow as one feels when the undertaker calls.

Claude was with them, and the conversation languished, because one of the three was anxious, and two were stricken with a sense of guilt. These were the two who had already discovered the secret. When Lady Mildred came to them, she found the two girls sitting hand in hand, and Valentine with hanging head and burning cheeks.

She looked at them for a moment with troubled eyes; then she held out her hands, and they sprang to their feet, and fell upon her neck, one on each side, and I think that all three were crying—those tears which flow freely and readily from women's eyes and express every emotion, whether of joy, or sorrow, or sympathy.

'My dears,' she said, 'I thought it would be easy to tell you. It used to seem a small thing that I should have some day to say to one of

you, "My dear, you are not my daughter." But it is not a small thing, children; it is a very hard thing. I have done, I fear, a grievous wrong to one of you, because Beatrice must have her own property; and Polly must have her brother, and you will no longer be equal.'

'Beatrice can give Polly half her fortune,' said Valentine.

'Polly can never take any of the fortune,' said Violet. 'But Claude can still be brother to both of us.'

Valentine made no reply to this proposition. That was because she had known for three months that he was not her brother. This kind of knowledge entirely changes one's views as regards fraternal affection. She knew, by this time, that a Brother cannot be shared. He is one and indivisible, like a strawberry.

'My other daughter,' Lady Mildred went on, looking straight between them, 'forgive me for bringing you up in ignorance. At first when I took you from your mother, I thought chiefly of helping a very poor and heavily-burdened woman. I thought little about the child's future. Then, when I placed her beside my

own little girl, and saw how pretty she was, and how winning, and how dainty, I thought how it would be to bring both up together, and not to let either know which of the two was the gentlewoman, and how it would be curious to watch them both, and I wondered whether birth would show. My dear children, what has been shown? Why, that there is no difference—not the slightest difference—between you. You have proved that there are, in every condition of life, children who may be trained and educated to have the manners and the instincts of the most well-bred and the most cultured. But I, for one, never doubted. Just so, among ourselves, the well born and the well educated, there are men who are clowns in manners and hogs in taste. Not the slightest difference between my two girls. Nobody can pretend that there is. Yet, the moment the truth is declared, the world will cry out that they knew it all along, and always said so, and it never had been any secret which of the two was of gentle birth. No one, as yet, has ventured to say that one of you is less gracious, less generous, less well-bred, less a gentlewoman, than the other. There is nothing in the world

so good as to be gentle, and one of you, my dears, is as gentle as the other. And your brother Claude, my dear Polly,' she added, still looking between the two, 'is as gentle as yourself. One of you must learn that you do not belong to gentle blood. I trust she will learn it without regret and without false shame. If Beatrice will divide what is in her power to share, and Polly will accept it, I shall be very glad. But if not, one of you is an heiress and the other has nothing. Nothing? Oh, yes, my children, she has our love, the love of Beatrice and myself, and she will always be, in all things, my daughter and her sister; and she has more than Beatrice, because she has a brother of whom she may be justly proud. Patience, Claude! I will give your sister to you in a few minutes!'

Nobody moved — nobody spoke — while Lady Mildred paused to collect herself. Then she continued, still looking between the two girls and holding them each by one hand.

'As for you, Beatrice, you become to-day mistress of your father's house, estates, and fortune; you have a great many acres of land, which used to mean a great many thousands a

year, but they do not mean so much now; you have investments which have been accumulating for you; you have houses—this very house is yours—with all that is in it. You have become to-day a person of very great importance; you will be courted wherever you go, for your fortune, and you will be told that it is for your beauty and your cleverness. You will be assailed by all kinds of persons who want money; there will be plenty of people ready to assure you that you have all the virtues. No one can possibly have a more difficult position than an heiress, my dear. I am very sorry for you, and I am sure you will thank me for keeping you so long from knowing the truth. It is a grievous misfortune, my child, for anybody, and especially for any young man or young woman, to be rich. I do not think any one should be allowed by law to be rich until he is at least fifty years of age, and I doubt whether most people are ready to take upon themselves the burden of wealth, even then. Perhaps sixty is too soon for most.'

'Violet.' She kissed her, and the girl started and turned quite pale, and trembled. 'Let me give you to your brother. Claude,

she is your sister. This is little Polly-which-is-Marla. Valentine, let me restore you to your own name. You are henceforth Beatrice, only daughter of Sir Lancelot Eldridge.'

'Oh! no, no!' said Valentine, 'I will never change my name; I shall always be Valentine.'

'Claude,' cried Violet, 'I was perfectly certain of it, always, from the very beginning; I remembered the wet sheets and the clothes-lines; I am sure I did; my own brother! You would rather it had been Valentine—you are disappointed in your sister; I am very sorry, for your sake.'

'Indeed, Violet—indeed I am not disappointed.' He did not say, though it was in his mind, that he was very glad it was not Valentine; nor did he—though that too was in his mind—inform her that her father was lying dead at that moment in the parish mortuary. He kissed her solemnly, and rather awkwardly, on the forehead; it takes time to learn how a sister should be kissed, and, in fact, there are many ways: the simple chaste salute on the brow is much in use as a formal acknowledgment of relationship, especially when people are no longer young; a common way is for the

brother to kiss his sister on both cheeks, one after the other, while he holds her head in his two hands. But this is only for quite young people, and when brother and sister do really love each other. A girl's lips must always, of course, be left for her lover. They are sacred.

'Valentine has had you all to herself for three months,' she said, blushing at his embrace; 'you must think of her already as your sister—not of me at all. But it is my turn now, Claude. Let us try to be a good deal to each other; I am selfish, and I hate—oh! how I hate—rough things; I can never go to Hoxton. But the world is not all Hoxton, is it? There are other places and other things; you won't be always pulling people out of the mire and getting into a rage about injustices and work-girls, will you?'

'No, Violet; we will try to be a good deal to each other.' But his eyes wandered from her, and rested upon Valentine.

Then Violet, in her quick way, turned to Valentine, still holding Claude's hand tightly. 'My dear, who should be Beatrice if not you? If it had been me,' she added, with more

feeling than grammar, 'I must have abdicated in your favour. As for sharing your fortune ——'

'You shall,' said Valentine; 'of that I am fully and absolutely resolved.'

Then Violet turned to Lady Mildred. Her eyes were very bright and her cheeks flushed.

'You have kissed me so often when I was Violet,' she said; 'kiss me now, when I am only Polly—Polly-which-is-Marla. We will go and live together, Claude and I, the children of the gutter; we will live somewhere, but not in Hoxton—not in Hoxton. I will set up my easel and paint. Perhaps I shall be able to sell my pictures, and I shall sign them Marla Monument, or Polly Monument, or Polly-which-is-Marla Monument, whichever Claude likes best. As for the fortune, I would die rather than take any of it. Sometimes you will let me come and see Valentine, won't you? I couldn't live without seeing her sometimes—just to tell her how the Princess likes the rags. We have often talked together about the Princess and the rags.'

'Oh, my dear—my dear!' cried Lady Mildred, distressed. 'You do not understand.

You are never to leave me, you are always my daughter—my Violet. Everything is exactly as before, only that I have given you a brother.'

She had also, Claude reflected, given her a large and very interesting family. But no mention was made of them on this occasion.

Then Lady Mildred drew Valentine away and left the brother and sister alone.

'I must confess to you, my brother,' Violet said, 'I must tell you the whole truth, if you despise me for it. Claude, I have always feared this day. Ever since I learned the story of Polly's parentage, I have had a presentiment. Oh, it was a certainty that I was the Polly, and not Valentine at all. Don't despise me too much, Claude. I was so selfish that I longed for it to be otherwise. I longed to be Beatrice, not for her money, but for her family. Don't hate me more than you can help, Claude. I loathed the thought of going back to these poor working people. When Lady Mildred told me that you were coming, I pictured a workman, and I was crimson with shame. Don't despise me more than you can help, Claude. Then sometimes, when we went about together, I have seemed to hear all the women

whispering—you know how kind women can be to each other—and saying, "What right has this common girl among us? Let her go back to her own people." Why, let me confess it all, I have even prayed that I might be Beatrice. And all the time, Valentine was so unselfish and so ready to meet her—other people—Claude,' she clung to him and looked into his eyes for some sign of forgiveness. 'Don't—don't despise me too much.'

'There is no question of despising, my sister.' He should have kissed her again at this point, but he was unused to sisters and did not know how such a step would have been received. 'I have known the secret for three months, Violet. Do not speak of forgiveness.'

'You have known that Valentine was not your sister? And yet——'

'And yet I have pretended. Finish your confession, if you have anything more to say, and then you will be happier.'

'Well then—when we actually went to see them—when we talked with Joe and with Melenda, oh! and with Sam, it was dreadful. It was more than I could bear. I can never go again to face Melenda and hear her dreadful

abuse. You will not ask me to go there again, will you, Claude? I will go to see my mother —sometimes—with Valentine, but not the others—not just yet. Perhaps in a year or two, one might be able to see Sam or Joe, one at a time, you know, and for a few minutes. Valentine will take me, perhaps, because she is not afraid of them. But not Melenda.'

'You shall never go, Violet, unless you wish to go. They do not expect you to go. Valentine has a message for you from them. You shall stay here, my sister, and live on in your world of Art and things Beautiful. Only, don't let it become an Enchanted Land. Remember that outside there are always the men and women who work.'

'Mother,' said Valentine, an hour later, when the family Solicitor had put the papers back into the box and gone his way with the Junior Partner; 'mother, I have a confession to make to you.'

'What is it, dear?'

'Only that I knew the secret from the very first day. Claude's mother told me.'

'Why, she is blind?'

'Yes; but she told me about the dimple in her cheek and the mark on the arm, which Violet has. But Claude never knew or suspected. That would have spoiled all. It was the thought that I was his sister which made him so ready to work for me, and so thoughtful.'

'It might have been so, Valentine; it was so proposed by me; but, most unfortunately, you see, Claude discovered the secret about the same time. His brother Joe told him. And Joe seems to have found it out from Violet's resemblance to her father. So, after all, the only one kept in the dark has been Violet.'

'Oh, is it possible? Could Claude know? Yet he always behaved exactly like a brother; and I thought——'

'Yes, dear; you were both acting a deceitful part all the time. Yet it was a very good thing for you that Claude played his part so well, without speaking of yourself, because it secured the services of an honourable and very deserving young man for you. It was unfortunate for him, because he naturally—I am not blaming him for it, mind—it was quite natural that he should fall in love with you.'

'Oh, mother!' Her cheek flushed quick.

'And, of course, considering his birth and relations, even if it were not for this miserable story of his father, which he has told me, and which Violet must never be suffered to learn, he clearly understands that he must never speak to you on the subject.'

Lady Mildred paused, but Valentine made no reply. Her cheeks were crimson and her lip trembling.

'I have talked the matter over with him. Claude is honourable and reasonable, as I expected he would be. My dear, he is a gentleman, though his father is a convict and a ticket-of-leave man and his mother was a washerwoman. Claude is a gentleman. Be quite easy in your mind, my child. He understands the position perfectly.

'The position?'

Lady Mildred went on slowly as if she was considering every word carefully, and watching her daughter as if she was looking for the effect of her words.

'You need be under no misapprehensions about his behaviour, and I am sure you will meet him half way, and continue in your old friendly relations, just as when you each thought

the other filled with brotherly and sisterly affection. The dreadful disgrace that has befallen him in this monstrous father of his need not make much difference for you.'

'Disgrace? For Claude? What disgrace can attach to him because his father is a Wretch?'

'My dear, the world would consider it a disgrace. To be sure, the world never knows more than half the facts, and never makes allowance. And as regards your future relations with Claude, you will find him quite willing always to be your servant. All his life, since you have accepted his services.'

'My servant? Claude?'

'He is really a *very* loyal and honourable boy. I am proud of my share in him. I have studied him for twelve years now, and have learned to think better of him every day. There is nowhere a young man who has greater command of himself, or, I believe, greater abilities, or is more trustworthy. He has assured me—and you may accept that assurance fully—that neither by word or look will he ever make you feel that he has ventured to love you.'

'Oh, mother, I cannot bear it!'

'That is arranged, then. You like him and you trust him; you have proved him true; you have already accepted his services; you have taken from him his profession and his career—in fact the Future of Distinction which awaited him; you have plunged into work which may very likely fail, and perhaps keep him in obscurity all his life. So that I think you are really bound to be friendly towards him.'

Valentine tried to speak, but she could not. The tears stood in her eyes, and her voice failed her.

'Of course, he has done all this out of pure love for you. It is quite right that you should know this. You, of course, my dear, must look for a very different kind of alliance. Sir Lancelot's daughter may take any place. Your birth, your fortune, and your beauty, my child, entitle you to be ambitious, and I do not doubt that a very good position indeed will be yours. The mere idea of a young man with such connections presuming—but Claude does not presume. He is a very good boy, poor fellow! and it will always be pleasant for you to remember, even when you are married and have other duties, that you possess what very few

women have—a truly loyal and faithful servant working for you among the poor; always humble and obscure, for your sake; desiring nothing better, for your sake; contented to have sacrificed himself and everything—all for love of you!'

'Oh, mother!' She fell sobbing at her mother's knees. 'You kill me. You kill me!'

'Why, Valentine—why? Beatrice, my dear, what is it?'

'Because—because—how can you talk of my marrying—any other man?' She whispered the last words, burying her face in her hands.

'Do you mean it seriously, my daughter?' Lady Mildred smiled, unobserved by her child—'do you mean that you can actually love this young man? My dear, remember what you are, and what he is;—the son of a convict, actually the son of a disgraceful felon, a professional thief and rogue, a man who was convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years' penal servitude for burglary with attempt at murder—and his mother only a washerwoman—his brother a plumber or locksmith, or whatever he calls himself, and his sister a working girl of the very lowest kind; and all

their friends, no doubt, such as one may expect. This would be a very pretty family connection for Sir Lancelot Eldridge's daughter, not to speak of myself! Am not I to be considered? Is there to be an absolute ignoring of rank and birth? Are we to have no pride at all in our family? Why, there never was anybody prouder of his family than Sir Lancelot!'

'Claude is—Claude,' Valentine replied; 'what do I care about his family? Besides, they all know me, and I know them, and they love me—and I'—she murmured softly—'oh! I love Claude!'

'Then, my dear,' said Lady Mildred, 'I withdraw my opposition. Make your own choice—marry whom you please. You will have your faithful servant still, whether you marry him or not. But there is one dreadful difficulty in the way.'

'What difficulty?'

'I am afraid it is an insuperable difficulty. Claude will never break that resolution of his—he will never speak to you of love. Oh! my poor child, you will—actually—have—to ask him yourself!'

CHAPTER THE LAST.

VALENTINE SPEAKS.

SHE would have, some time, to speak to her lover, who would never speak to her. This is a thing which a girl does not forget in a hurry. It was not until the end of the year, the very last day in the year, that she did speak, and then she was constrained by a force strong enough to break through her womanly reserve.

They were at Bournemouth, whither, in late October, Valentine brought the dying girl and her friends. A change to Bournemouth would not save her; no change of place and air would save her, any more than a change of climate would save the poor wretch over whom the great car of Juggernath has passed, crushing bones and grinding limbs. All the year round this great car of ours moves slowly onwards, crushing the limbs of hapless women, and pounding and beating them to

death. Some of us have eyes to see them writhing beneath the wheels, and each says to each—of those, that is, who do have eyes to see—that it is not his fault. No; it is nobody's fault, but perhaps some day the working men as well will receive eyes to see their suffering, and ears to hear their cries, and then they will perhaps try to find the remedy which we have failed to find. Not all of them have the good fortune that befel Lotty in being taken out of the noise and the dirt, the privation and the hunger, for just a few weeks, a brief holiday, after her eight years' suffering, of peace and rest. Happy girl! To be lapped in love and plenty, though all her bones were broken and though life was ebbing rapidly away. Happy girl! To forget, before she died, the existence of the sweater and the manufacturer; to feel no more the weight of that Accursed Law of Elevenpence-Ha'penny, even though the day was swiftly drawing near when there would be set up, in the green churchyard upon the hillside, among the multitudes of white marble crosses, one more to mark the resting-place of an obscure girl slowly and cruelly done to death. Yet no one's fault. No, it is no one's fault.

When first Lotty came she could be wheeled about a little in a chair ; the sun was still warm at mid-day, the yellow leaves were still on the trees, there were still flowers in the great garden of the town ; they could watch the sea, mysterious, wonderful, to girls who had never seen it before ; and listen to the plash of the water upon the shore and breathe the fragrance of the pines. But very soon the sun lost his warmth even at noon, and the days grew short and cold, and Lotty went out no more.

Then she sat in a warm room where Valentine ministered to her and Melenda nursed her day and night, her mind filled with sweet thoughts and gentle hopes, which she had never known before Valentine came to her, so that her deathbed was indeed to her an opening of the Gate of Life. The whole of the dreadful past was clean forgotten ; she remembered no more the long and weary days with the never-ending click of needle and thimble, and the slow creeping hours, the dull pain in her back, the hunger of the time, the sleepless nights, when she longed to moan aloud but would not, for fear of disturbing the girls asleep in the same bed with her. Ivy Lane was far away ;

it receded farther every day; the girl had never been there; it was a dream; always she had been sitting in this soft chair, and lying on the soft bed, eating grapes, while Valentine read to her or made sweet music for her, or while she gazed through one of those Twelve Gates, which are never shut by day or night, into the Wondrous City. And always Melenda quiet and subdued, and never in a rage, and Lizzie contented and happy.

There came a day—it was the last day of the year—when the poor child was to feel her pain no more. She was lying with a smile upon her lips, and in her soft and tender eyes as they rested on Valentine or on Melenda lay love unspeakable. They all knew—she knew herself—that she was dying. At the foot of the bed stood Lizzie weeping without restraint, and at the head Melenda dry-eyed, self-contained, sat holding Lotty's white long fingers. She would cry when she could do nothing more, but not till then.

'Dear Lotty,' whispered Valentine, bending over her, 'your troubles are nearly over now.'

Lotty made no reply. Her heavy eyes rolled slowly round till they rested on Melenda.

'There is no more sorrow, dear,' Valentine went on, 'nor any pain left for you. Perhaps you will see us all again soon; Melenda, and Lizzie, and me.'

The dying girl made answer none. In her last moments she was back again, in imagination, among the shirts and button-holes.

'Never mind what they said, Melenda dear,' she murmured, her eyes wandering as if there was something she did not quite understand. 'Them Germans do swear awful and call dreadful names, but never mind what they said; don't get into a rage; what does it matter so long as they give us the work?'

'Lotty, there is no more work: it is all done,' said Valentine, 'all done and put away —and paid for,' she added. 'Oh! it is paid for, with this.'

'The room gets hot, doesn't it, in the afternoon, and the days get longer and longer. Oh! Melenda, it's you who do all the work. It's my back, dear—I must lay down again. Give Lizzie my bread and butter, dear, when she comes in. I don't want any dinner when I'm laying down. Poor Liz, she's always

hungry, isn't she? Don't be hard on Liz, Melenda. Think of Tilly.'

Melenda clutched her hands and set her lips; but her eyes were dry.

'When Tilly comes home again, Melenda, we won't be cruel to her and drive her away, will we? Let us take her back again, and pretend we don't know. Oh! Melenda—she was so dreadful poor, and she was always an impatient one. She wasn't brave and strong, like you.'

Valentine stepped back, so that the girl's eyes should fall on no one but her old companion.

'I haven't done much work lately, have I? because I've been so bad, but I feel better now. There's no pain in my back to-day, and I shall soon be quite well. The Doctor said so—and Valentine—who is Valentine? Melenda'—her eyes were full now of a vague yearning as if after something unknown—'Melenda, we've been friends, haven't we?—we've always been friends.'

She closed her eyes and her hands dropped. Melenda kissed her, breaking out into passionate cries and weeping. But Lizzie stopped crying,

and laid the limbs straight, and folded the arms across her breast. For Lotty was dead.

. . . . . .

When Claude came in the afternoon, Valentine led him into the room where the Dead girl lay.

'See,' she whispered. 'This is the beautiful face she was meant to have. You can discern it now, though the cheek is so thin. Did you think our poor Lotty could ever have been half so pretty? Her face was smirched and spoiled by our cruelty and neglect and apathy, not by any sins of her own, poor child! Since she ceased to work she has grown daily more beautiful—and now she is dead. As the Doctor said, what better thing could befall her? Oh! Claude, we have been Christians for nearly two thousand years, and we can say still that the best thing for thousands among us is to die.'

'Are we Christians?' he replied. 'Have we, even yet, begun to understand what Christianity means?'

Presently they left the chamber and went out together upon the cliff. It was a still afternoon, with a clear sky and no wind, and in the west there was a glorious winter sunset.

When the sun had quite gone down there arose a splendid afterglow, red and rosy, high in the western sky, and reflected in the ocean, full of consolation and of hope; and below their feet the quiet waters lapped upon the shore. Behind them, in the east, there was a blackness in the sky that could be felt.

'Claude,' she whispered, 'we are still in the presence of the Dead. This place is like a church; and—oh! I can speak at last.'

'Speak, Valentine. What is it you would say?'

'My mother tells me you have confessed things—things about me. And that you said foolish things about your father's sins and your own—inheritance. And that your lips were sealed.'

'They were not foolish things, Valentine; they were real things. How could such as myself ask you to share with me my inheritance of shame?'

'Oh, Claude! Have I not shared it already? Can I ever cease to share it? Forget that foolishness. Besides—you are—yourself. We are not brother and sister; you have known that all along, and so have I. There lies a

great garden at our feet, where we can work—if we work together—always together. Claude, have I said enough? Oh! do not ask me to say more.'

He took her hand and kissed it. He bent his head and met her lips and kissed them. But he could not speak for a while. Presently he found a voice.

'Oh, my Queen!' he murmured. 'Oh, my mistress! Oh, my Lady and my Love!' She raised her head, while the red light in the west filled her eyes and made them wondrous.

'Hand in hand, Claude, all our lives.'

So, almost beside the girl's dead body, these lovers were betrothed.

The afterglow died in the west; the last day of the year was over; the Past was done; but in their hearts there sprang the new light of another day.

THE END.

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